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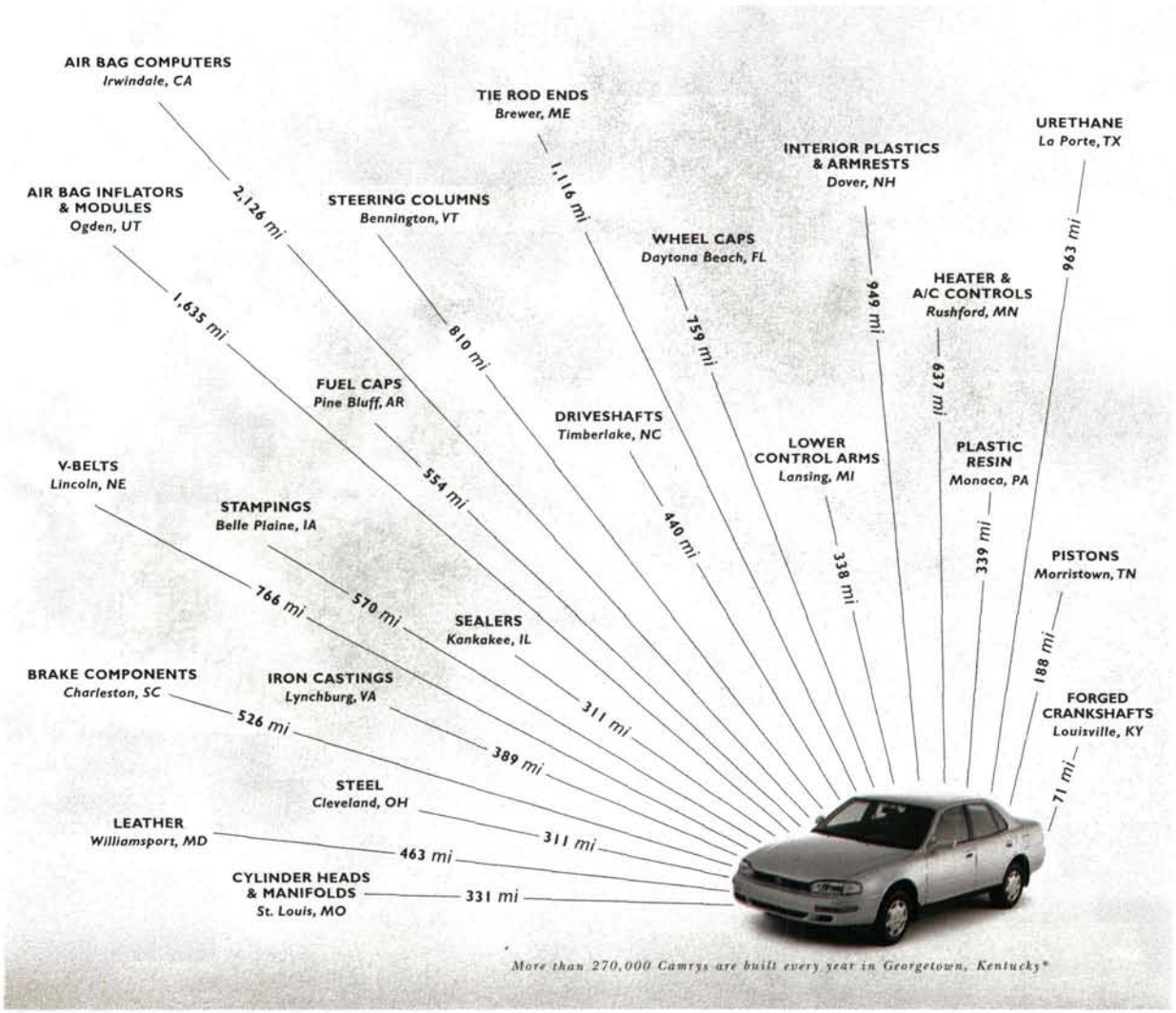

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

JULY 17 & 24, 1995

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CORRESPONDENCE

Southern accents

To the editors:

Michael Lind's screed ("The Southern Coup," June 19) is an embarrassment of unsubstantiated generalities common to that breed of Southerners who sneer at their home region's politics in order to ingratiate themselves with Yankee liberals. Among Lind's grossest inanities are his linking, in one paragraph, of Jack Kemp with the Jesse Helms wing of the GOP; his assertion that the "Southern ruling class" has "an obsessive fear of the subversive effects of education" (try telling that to recent Southern Republican Governors Lamar Alexander, Carroll Campbell, Buddy Roemer or Dave Treen); and his insulting and obtuse reference to the South as "the least 'American' section of the country."

Lind's bogeyman-filled piece reads less like an example of serious shoeleather journalism than like the therapy-session ramblings of an adolescent. Before he vents his own baseless prejudices, Lind should interview Northern Republican governors Thompson (Wisconsin), Engler (Michigan), Pataki (New York), Voinovich (Ohio), Weld (Massachusetts) or Edgar (Illinois) about how the GOP supposedly is dominated by the "Southern ruling class."

QUIN HILLYER
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

Many of the Southern values and attitudes that Michael Lind enumerates in his excellent article "The Southern Coup" were established long before the South took over the Republican Party. What's different today is that, thanks to massive migration to the Sunbelt, the states of the South and Southwest are far more important electorally than they were a generation or two ago. Consequently, their views matter far more to politicians on the national scene than they had ever before.

The real question is: In the face of massive immigration and increased urbanization—trends that might have been expected to make the South more like the rest of the country—how have the "Southern Bourbons" managed to cling to power and make the rest of the country more like the South?

JEFFREY BENDIX
Cleveland Heights, Ohio

To the editors:

Michael Lind's thesis that the South has captured the Republican Party and the nation is like the bucket in Hank Williams's song: full of holes. Southerners do not have a patent on racism. Emaciated government has been a goal of heartland Republicans since the dawn of Republicanism. The Northeastern elite did not control the Republican Party in days of yore. It cohabited uncomfortably with the isolationist and nativist Midwestern wing.

To compare Gingrich, Armey and Gramm to Bourbons is to insult Bourbons. To mention Gingrich and Gramm in the same breath as Wade and the Percys veers close to sacrilege. Bourbons had failings, but they exhibited public courtliness, held to a certain noblesse oblige and practiced a bit of racial accommodation. Eventually they lost control of the upcountry wool-hat boys because they were not rabid racists and because they did not pay attention to the concerns of rural populists. The Bourbons were redolent of magnolias, wide porches, plantations and fine whiskey. Malls and ranch houses seem the natural habitat of the new Republicans. Cocktails are their beverage. Gingrich, Armey and many Southern Republicans are transplanted Yankees who have yet to learn how to behave like real Southerners. For one thing, they do not have good manners. Southern Republicans are basically suburbanites.

The South hasn't taken over the country. California has.

JOHN H. WILDE
Greenwood, South Carolina

Children's hour

To the editors:

Ruth Shalit's article, "Witch Hunt" (June 19), by ignorance or design, makes all the same mistakes as articles that have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* about the Fells Acre Day School child abuse case. Allegations that were never part of the Amirault trials are incorrectly portrayed as courtroom evidence. Interviews with a pediatric nurse that occurred after children had already detailed instances of abuse to police are incorrectly portrayed as occurring prior to police interviews, thus erroneously inflating their importance in the Amirault investigation. Hysterical scenarios in which parents allegedly are "told to grill their children" simply never occurred.

None of this is surprising. Shalit made no attempt to speak with or quote any of the parents she claims were somehow duped in what is ludicrously portrayed as the biggest conspiracy scenario since JFK. Also escaping Shalit's gaze is the perspective of the Fells Acre jurors, all of whom remain convinced of the Amiraults' guilt

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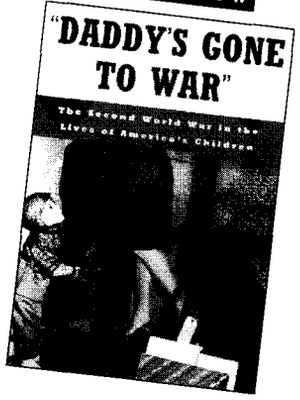

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beyond a reasonable doubt. Of course, no attempt is made to solicit, let alone acknowledge, the anguished perspective of the real victims in the Fells Acre case: the children the Amiraults abused.

There are facts the cult of Amirault defenders do not want anyone to read or hear. That is why they never quote the jurors, the nine children who testified, their parents, the expert courtroom testimony or the cross-examinations undertaken by some of Boston's best defense attorneys. The fact is that two separate juries saw the children face to face, listened to their testimony, judged their credibility, weighed all the evidence and heard highly qualified defense attorneys raise every single argument that Amirault defenders are rehashing now.

EDWARD CAFASSO
Attorney General's office,
Boston, Massachusetts

Ruth Shalit replies:

True, the state of Massachusetts did not present all the children's allegations as evidence. Omitted, for instance, was one 4-year-old girl's insistence that the Amirault family dressed up as giant elephants who "sprayed water on her" and "broke her nose." As reported, the Amiraults were instead charged with donning clown outfits and raping children with magic wands and pencils in a "secret room." The interviews by police officers and therapists occurred concurrently, as teams of state interrogators were brought in to press the children to incriminate their teachers. Cafasso's contention that parents were not told to grill their children about secret rooms and bad clowns is false. Malden Police Detective John Rivers has admitted that panicky parents were given precisely these instructions.

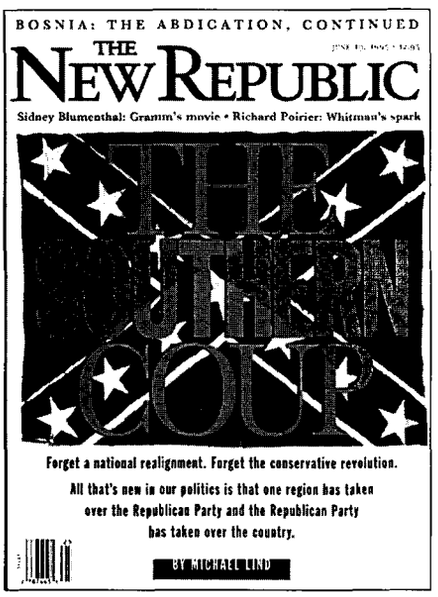
Leaves out

To the editors:

Richard Poirier's piece "The Escape Artist" (June 19), presumably a review of my Walt Whitman book, says so little about the real subject of the book that I must respond. The book's topic is made clear in its title: *Walt Whitman's* America: *A* Cultural *Biography*. Clear, except for those blinkered by their own agenda. There are other topics I could have chosen. I could have written on "Whitman and Contemporary Homosexuality," or "Whitman's Poetry: Another Close Reading," or "Whitman and Emerson, One More Time." But these topics—a sampling of which appear in Poirier's article—have been done to death. The true aim of scholarship (too often forgotten by today's critics) is to expand the field of knowledge and understanding. My effort in this direction is to relate Whitman, more precisely than has been previously done, to nineteenth-century America and to our America.

Whitman constantly called for this kind of historical exploration. "In estimating my volumes," he wrote, "the world's current times and deeds, and their spirit, must first be profoundly estimated." The poet fails, he wrote, "if he does not flood himself with the immediate age as with vast oceanic tides ... if he be not himself the age transfigured." In "By Blue Ontario's Shore," he describes the poet "Attracting [the nation] body and soul to himself, hanging on its neck with incomparable love,/Plunging his seminal muscle into its merits and demerits."

Whitman's writings open countless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Forget a national realignment. Forget the conservative revolution.
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BY MICHAEL LIND

windows onto American life. *That* is my interest and *that* the subject of my book. To avoid imposing today's ideas on the past, I rely on the documents of Whitman's time: the newspapers he read, the plays he attended, the photographs he saw and so on. For those who value self-referential playing with language and text more than historical scholarship, my approach may seem, in Poirier's words, "the discipline of the collector." My method, however, is that of the responsible biographer and cultural historian.

DAVID S. REYNOLDS
Old Westbury, New York

Mischievous

To the editors:

If I did not know better, Paul Johnson's mischievous caricature of Joseph Smith and the Mormon Church he claimed to restore ("The Alchemist," June 12) would have made me think all Mormons are kooks.

At least as "strange" as the story he told are the stories of the appearance of God to Moses in the likeness of a burning bush and the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Moses was only half-articulate and required a spokesman. He had killed an Egyptian. It would have been hard to find a more poor and marginal people in Egypt than the Hebrew slaves. Moses was initially dismissed by Pharaoh as a cheap magician and a fraud. If divine miracles are "magic," then the parting of the Red Sea by Moses, the calling down of fire from heaven by Elijah, and the amazing rescue of Jerusalem from the Assyrian siege in the days of Isaiah could all be labeled acts of first-rate magicians.

Jesus Christ was not educated in the traditional manner. His first disciples were poor, possibly half-literate, young fishermen. His ministry was characterized by miracles, such as healing the sick and his own resurrection from the dead. He was accused of performing his miracles through the power of the devil and was called "that deceiver." Many of his followers were publicans and sinners before they heeded his calls to repent.

RANDALL GUYNN
London, England

Cheap shot

To the editors:

Fred Barnes has once again revealed his tenuous hold on reality ("Cheap Thrill," June 19). He perpetuates the myth that "the public is bent on cutting federal programs in practice as well as theory." I would refer him to a recent *Washington Post*/ABC News poll in which 56 percent of those polled opposed the Senate Republican plan to gouge dozens of programs in order to balance the budget by 2002. Sixty percent were opposed to an even more severe House plan. That doesn't sound like a public "bent on cutting federal programs" to me.

As for President Clinton's "irrelevant fight" with the National Rifle Association, Barnes belittles Clinton's suggestion as to the disposition of the NRA's receipts from its fund-raising letter; in so doing, Barnes belittles the effect of that letter on an already paranoid fringe. I have been amused to see Bob Dole and his conservative cohorts condemning movies, TV, radio and even art for fostering cultural and moral decay in American society, while vehemently denying that the likes of G. Gordon Liddy and other no-brainer talk show hosts might have had anything to do with fostering the sick environment which threatens to make things like the Oklahoma City bombing a frighteningly permanent part of our culture.

MARYELLEN LAKE
Becket, Massachusetts

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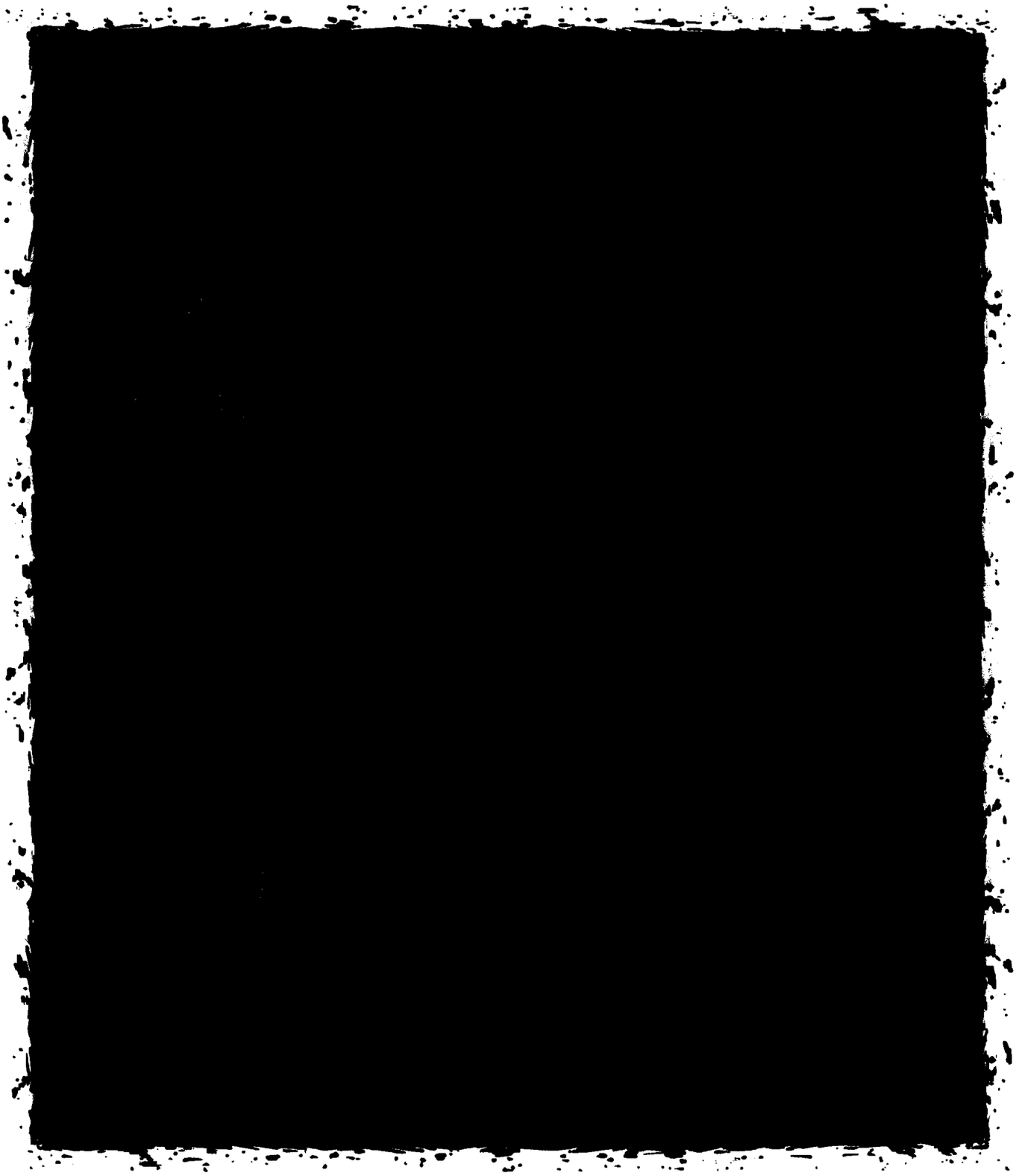

In the early 1900s, the world was at peace and democracy was ascendent. But a series of missteps led to devastating world wars and depression, culminating with the Cold War. The world in 1995 looks much the same as it did at the turn of the century. Will we get it right this time? Or are we destined to relive the mistakes of the past? Forbes Magazine examines America's pivotal role in shaping the course of this century and what it must do now to assure peace and freedom in the 21st century.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JULY 17 & 24, 1995

WORK FEAR

President Clinton, it's now clear, made two large mistakes in his attempt to "end welfare as we know it." The first, as his own chief of staff acknowledges, was his 1994 decision to delay welfare reform while he pursued a doomed health care overhaul. The second is more subtle, but ultimately more damaging: his failure, at any time in his presidency, to make the case that ending welfare requires a system of last-resort, public-service jobs, and that this costs money.

Sure, Clinton talked vaguely about public jobs during the campaign. After two years on welfare, he said, "those who can work will have to go to work, either by taking a job in the private sector or through community service." Private employment is to be preferred, in this logic, but community service jobs are a necessary backup. How do you enforce a work requirement on destitute recipients who claim, often plausibly, that they can't find private-sector work? By having a public job ready and waiting.

But public jobs have many enemies. Conservatives anticipate big-government boondoggles; the idea does seem terribly Old Democrat. Yet a key Old Democrat interest group, organized labor, also hates it, fearing that low-wage "workfare" workers will displace unionized civil servants. It wasn't long ago that liberal Democrats routinely denounced public-sector work requirements for welfare recipients as "slavefare."

Above all, public jobs are expensive. To support a single mother on welfare, you need to pay for a check. To support that mother with a public job, you need the same check, plus (according to the Congressional Budget Office) about $6,000 for supervisors and child care.

This may explain why, in 1994, Clinton kept to a minimum the number of public jobs his two-years-and-go-to-work proposal would have required. There are about 5 million families receiving checks from the basic federal welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The Clintonites exempted much of this caseload from their plan's work provisions, which let them claim that they needed to create only about 170,000 public jobs by 1999. Even today, Clinton flirts with the idea that the private sector can be induced, through subsidies, to employ a large percentage of welfare recipients, though such schemes have uniformly failed in the past. Meanwhile, in the Senate, the Democratic welfare bill (endorsed by Clinton) ostentatiously disdains public jobs, giving states credit only for "getting recipients into *real* jobs ... not workfare."

By failing to defend public jobs, Clinton and the Democrats set the stage for the most stunning and cynical development in this year's welfare debate—the Republicans' retreat from a "work" solution to the welfare mess. "Workfare," remember, was Ronald Reagan's idea, not Bill Clinton's. A long time ago—last November, to be precise—the House Republican Contract with America earmarked $10 billion to pay for workfare jobs. But the money quickly disappeared in the GOP's tax- and budget-cutting push. Today a Republican endorsing the Contract with America's work provisions would probably be denounced as a Beltway big spender. After all, Democrats seem to agree that workfare jobs are a bad idea! Why should taxpayers fund them?

In place of workfare, Republicans now offer "block grants." The House has already passed a bill that ends AFDC and parcels out the federal share of its cost to the states in the form of grants. The Senate may soon begin floor debate on its own block grant bill. Governors are supposed to take these fixed block grants and devise their own welfare systems. They do not have to contribute any state money to the effort. They do not, in fact, have to offer any cash benefits to the poor at all.

Michael Kinsley charges that the GOP block grant bills lack "even a theory" as to how they will end the problem of welfare dependency. Other liberals predict that they will produce a "race to the bottom," as states compete to lower local taxes by cutting benefits and chasing the poor to other jurisdictions. But maybe the Republicans do have a theory, and the theory is that there will be a race to the bottom. As states rush to slash benefits and impose time limits (and future Congresses slice away at the block grants) the word will go out that welfare is no longer a reliable means of support. Young women will avoid making the choices—e.g., bearing children outside of marriage—that they now make in the tacit expectation that welfare will maintain them. It's a harsh theory, to say the least, depending as it does on the possibility that hundreds of thousands of needy Americans may wind up on the streets.

Why not offer those needing help the chance to earn it? The prospect of work should by itself encourage potential single mothers to make better choices (such as teaming up with another breadwinner). Yet a work solution is the one reform the budget-driven Republican bills would discourage. True, the GOP's House and Senate bills both have impressive-sounding work "requirements." The House bill, for example, would seemingly require half of

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those on welfare to be working, in workfare jobs if necessary, by 2003. But because the bills provide no money to fund the work, these requirements are almost certainly hollow. (See "So Now You Know," by Paul Offner, July 10.) The Congressional Budget Office estimates that virtually every state will fail the Senate work requirements. States will only be able to meet the House standard by exploiting a GOP loophole that allows them to count as "working" those who are simply lopped off the rolls.

The White House has horrified liberals by *not* threatening to veto a welfare bill that "block grants" the basic AFDC program. Block grant opponents fear this isn't a cynical political calculation by Clinton—as an ex-governor, he may actually think block grants are a good idea. Clinton's aides, for their part, suggest that if the president threatens to veto a block grant bill that will only encourage Republicans to pass it. But it's pretty clear that Clinton would happily sign such a bill if it contained modifications designed to ensure that states kept spending their own money on the poor ("maintenance of effort"), that states could get extra funds in times of recession or population growth, and that more money generally were available for putting recipients to work.

We agree with Clinton's implicit argument that, despite the drawbacks of block grants, such a deal would constitute an improvement over the status quo. The problem of welfare dependence is so acute, and our knowledge about how to solve it so limited, that a period of experimentation is in order—*if* the money is there to fund the approach that is most promising, namely requiring work.

But the White House will almost certainly not be able to cut such a deal without a veto threat (or an actual veto). The Senate majority is currently moving away from Clinton, not toward him. Republicans show no inclination to spend more money. There is even talk of tossing the food stamp program into the block grant (something the administration *has* promised to veto).

Two strategies are called for. First, Clinton needs to find some concessions to make to the right. For example, Senator Lauch Faircloth, a conservative Republican, has a reasonable complaint about the legalistic procedures that make it hard for states to introduce "pay for performance" schemes (in which recipients get their checks only after they've worked). And then there is the right's cherished "family cap" proposal, which would deny mothers additional federal benefits for additional children they have while on welfare. The mother's check would not be reduced; she just wouldn't get a (relatively small) increase. Is that so awful?

Second, to make a veto threat credible, the president could start to make, to the voters, the case he hasn't made—that real welfare reform requires billions in spending to fund last-resort public jobs. This is no time for Clinton's preferred New Democrat balance of toughness with compassion. It's toughness, in this case, that requires the spending. Without money, the Republicans' "work" provisions are phony. With money, they can be real. Will taxpayers be willing to spend more in order to end welfare? We think that's the one reason they might. •

NOTEBOOK

SIC TRANSIT: The New York State Assembly had to recess after Grateful Dead concertgoers reserved all available hotel rooms in the state capital.... The Pentagon concluded that Air Force officials did not violate military policy when they spent $116,000 to fly former Lt. General Joseph Ashy and his cat from Italy to Colorado.... Teenagers in Lexington, Kentucky, threw rocks and attacked motorists following the "What Else You Gonna Do 2" party, designed to keep kids off the streets and out of trouble.... Late for school, a 7-year-old boy from Colebrook, New Hampshire, abandoned his bicycle and stole a Ford Escort.... Georgia Insurance Commissioner John Oxedine objected to a 4 percent insurance tax on religious organizations as a "tax against God."... Freedom Enterprises in Columbia, South Carolina, began marketing an "anti-Confederate" flag that features a black fist clenched at the center of a traditional Confederate flag.... On NBC's "Meet the Press," Senate Majority Whip Trent Lott remarked that Republicans are "the party of Mars, but we would like to have the Venus side of the American society in our party, too."

MOUTHS OF BABES:

Chick Accuses Some of Her Male Colleagues of Sexism

Accusing some of her male colleagues of sexism, Los Angeles Councilwoman Laura Chick lashed out at City Hall on Thursday as the "most sexist, good-old-boys work environment that I've ever been in."

—*The Los Angeles Times*, June 23.

(Thanks to Gary Gleb of Sherman Oaks, California.)

INDECENT ACTS: No one can deny that the Internet is alive with every fetish and perversion you can imagine—and a thousand or two more you can't. Chances are you would sleep better knowing there's a way to prevent junior from creeping downstairs at three in the morning to sneak a peek at alt.sex.nakednewt. But the ominously titled Communications Decency Act that passed overwhelmingly in the Senate last week isn't it. The bill, sponsored by James Exon of Nebraska, would punish people who transmit or receive pornography on the Internet, or who make so-called indecent material available to minors. Offenders face two-year prison terms and fines of up to $100,000. There's so much wrong here it's hard to know where to begin. Since there's no reliable way to tell if legal yet "indecent" material, whatever that may mean, is deliberately being sent to children, enforcing the law would be impossible. To duck the problem, Exon worded the bill so broadly that it makes criminsals not

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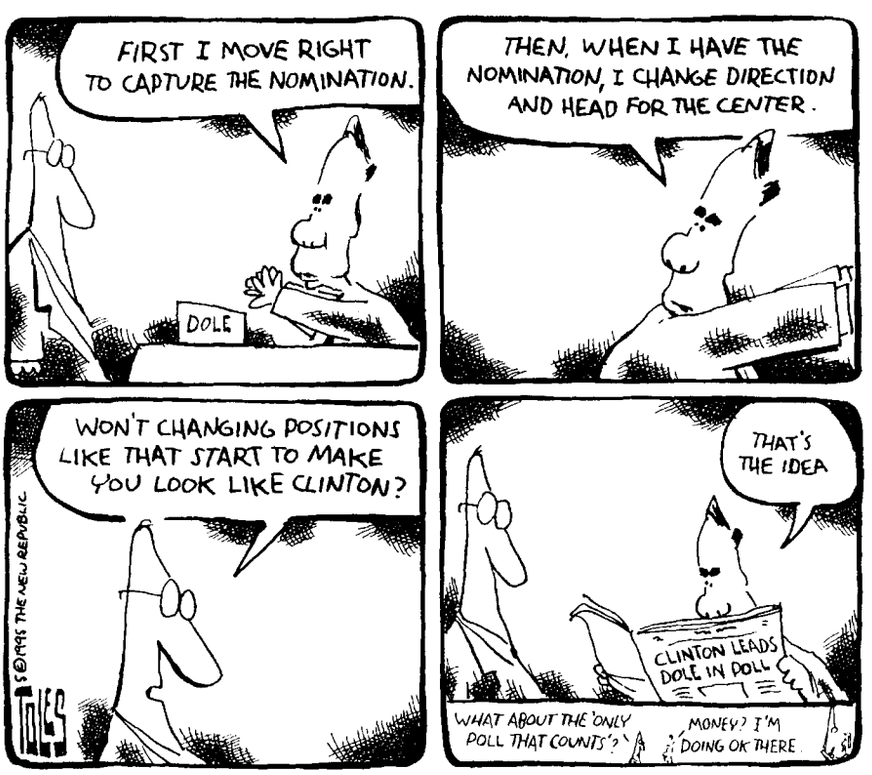
just out of the person who posts the offending material, but out of every unwitting Internet provider whose computer it passes through. Quite possibly, fearful providers will stop carrying discussion groups that might touch on "indecent" topics. That may suit Exon, who paraded around the Senate with his "blue book" of nudie pix his staff had found on-line. But it's a patent infringement on First Amendment rights. Fortunately, the bill may die in the House. Newt Gingrich, of all people, denounced it as "clearly a violation of free speech and it's a violation of the rights of adults to communicate with each other." The speaker favors the preferable fix of developing software programs to let parents block out material they don't want their kids to see. Can it be that Newt Gingrich is just about the only one in Congress standing on principle?


FIRST I MOVE RIGHT TO CAPTURE THE NOMINATION.
DOLE
THEN, WHEN I HAVE THE NOMINATION, I CHANGE DIRECTION AND HEAD FOR THE CENTER.
WON'T CHANGING POSITIONS LIKE THAT START TO MAKE YOU LOOK LIKE CLINTON?
©1995 THE NEW REPUBLIC
THAT'S THE IDEA
CLINTON LEADS DOLE IN POLL
WHAT ABOUT THE 'ONLY POLL THAT COUNTS'?
MONEY? I'M DOING OK THERE.

THE EXECUTIONER'S SONG: In his five years as governor of Florida, Lawton Chiles has never commuted a death sentence. But, as the state prepared last week to execute Joe Spaziano, a man who may well be innocent, Chiles admirably issued a temporary stay. Spaziano was convicted in 1976 of the murder of a young woman on the flimsiest of evidence: the hypnosis-induced testimony of a teenage, drug-using motorcycle gang wannabe, who now can barely recall the trial itself, much less his testimony against Spaziano. The witness, a man named Tony Dilisio, "remembered" under hypnosis that Spaziano had taken him to a dump, shown him the body of a woman and bragged that murder was his "style." The judge allowed the jury to hear the testimony, though a later Florida Supreme Court decision, reflecting current scientific consensus, ruled that hypnotically induced evidence was inadmissible. Richard Ofshe, a professor of sociology at Berkeley and an expert on the subject of false memories, reviewed Dilisio's testimony and concluded in a deposition that it was "nonsense upon stilts." Dilisio's memories, he said, were not just enhanced but entirely created by the hypnosis. Even Dilisio, in an interview with *The Miami Herald*, expressed doubt about his story and called for a stay. Chiles granted it on June 15; now his lawyers are reconsidering the decision. Chiles's action was courageous and justified. The execution of Joe Spaziano would be an indelible stain on his record.

FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES: There is no vice president in Egypt, and there has not been one since 1981 when Hosni Mubarak, who was then vice president, replaced the murdered Anwar Sadat. Maybe Mubarak thinks he is spooked; maybe he's telling himself that had he a designated successor, he might already be dead. That's one of the differences between constitutional governments and personal authoritarianism. We pride ourselves on preparing for orderly transfers of power whether the circumstances be routine like elections, or unusual like assassinations. They see themselves as hostages to hostile fate, at once random and ever-present, which is why just about everybody is seen as potentially treacherous. Mubarak's close call in Ethiopia (close for him but not for those left dead) was the umpteenth time he has eluded the assassin's bullet. There are, in fact, many Egyptians disloyal to the regime, and Mubarak has been waging a harsh and relentless war against the Islamic extremist movements from which they come. But it is these movements that initiate the terror, and it is these that have escalated it. Maybe Mubarak didn't have much evidence when he accused Sudan of being responsible for the Addis Ababa carnage. But it is not implausible. In any case, the carnage has an international context: there are Muslim fanatic governments that rely on terror for political ends, and there are Muslim fanatic opposition groups that rely on terror even more. God only knows how many innocents have been slaughtered by Muslim fundamentalists in Pakistan in these last few days. In the Islamic orbit, from Pakistan to Iran, through old Egypt and emergent Palestine, and all the way to Algeria, men and women in official life and men and women with ordinary lives know that they have lost one of the first of their basic human rights, the expectation that they will die in good time, at home, and in their own beds. •

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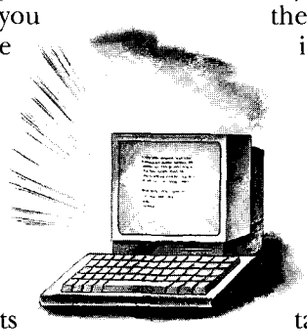
CONSUMED

PACK RAT

By Bradley W. Bloch

There's something about purchasing a major appliance that sets off a flurry of transformative activity. It's hard to plug in a pristine, new refrigerator without reassessing your eating habits, or to set up a new stereo without reflexively cataloguing your unruly music collection. So, when I recently took delivery of a new personal computer, I found myself aglow with the urge to organize my life. Now that I was sitting on top of enough digital firepower to launch a Saturn V, I figured I could at least straighten out my address book.

Apparently a lot of people feel the same way. Computer stores now do a brisk business in "personal information managers," software that helps you manage yourself. These programs are like Filofaxes, only more so: not only do they keep track of your appointments, possessions, phone numbers, to-do lists, ongoing projects and finances, they link all this stuff together, allowing you to analyze and reconfigure it according to organizational whim. Seduced by the no-nonsense scolding on the box—"STOP MAKING EXCUSES! GET ORGANIZED NOW!"—and its claims of infinite customizability, I decided to purchase something called PackRat 5.0. As I soon discovered, PackRat *is* infinitely customizable, so much so that I'm still trying to figure out how to use it. But that's OK; a Ph.D. cyber-acquaintance told me that the program took him "only a month or so" to master. And I remain tantalized by the prospect that once I do, I will never again wonder how long it took me to write a particular memo or when the last time was I called my parents or what percentage of my music collection is devoted to the early Bob Dylan. Transfigured into a walking repository of personal certainty, I wonder if I'll have anything left to wonder about at all.



Since personal certainty is one of the qualities that human beings are always seeking, perhaps it's to be expected that this level of arcane record-keeping has crept into even the most innocuous-sounding software. A package called *Master Cook II* lets you record your recipes and then retrieve them "by any combination of name, source, categories, ingredients, cost or nutritional composition," while its "wine list manager" keeps a running tally of your Bordeaux and Chardonnay. The *Golf Digest ScoreCard* "tracks detailed information for any course you play, including hole score, putts, fairways hit, sand traps, penalty strokes and driving distance," providing the weekend duffer with a level of analysis more commonly associated with PGA veterans. Even the mysteries of the occult are no longer beyond the reach of such accounting. *Cyber Tarot*, a program published by HarperCollins Interactive, offers not only computerized tarot sessions but "a fully automated 'user history' which maintains statistical" and even "graphical records of all saved readings."

Much has been written about the on-line information deluge, about the psychic stress of being confronted with everything from Hubble Space Telescope photographs to the University of Oslo card catalog. Perhaps our fate, however, is to drown not in data about the world but in data about ourselves. Though it's tempting to blame the computer revolution for the transformation of our lives into a giant time-and-motion study, in fact we have long imbued list-making and record-keeping with redemptive powers. When Benjamin Franklin, the father of American self-improvement, embarked on his "bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection," he did so with a daily chart on which he recorded with a check mark transgressions against the thirteen virtues of Temperance, Silence, Chastity, Order and so on. Closer to our own time, the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous include making "a list of all persons we had harmed" and conducting a "searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

Besides the promise of moral rectitude, list-making holds forth the fantasy of total control, of the flotation tank-like calm that will ensue once the bills are paid, the garden weeded, the in-box emptied. It is this yearning that Chemical Bank taps into with its current print campaign, which uses various metaphors to contrast the entropic disarray of our everyday existence with the crisp certainty that banking with Chemical provides. "My Life," reads the caption under a tangled skein of cassette tape; "My Bank Account," on the other hand, is depicted as a compact disc: digital, immutable, infinitely seductive in its coolness.

Yet even Benjamin Franklin discovered that life always defies our schemes for neatening it. Of all the virtues, it was not Temperance or Chastity that bedeviled him, but Order. He found that it could not be "exactly observ'd" by one who "must mix with the World." Franklin had originally intended to concentrate on one virtue each week, and mastering that, move to the next, completing four cycles a year. But he soon found time to make it through only one cycle each year, then one every several years, eventually giving the whole thing up because he was too busy "being employ'd in Voyages and Business abroad with a Multiplicity of Affairs, that interfered." Tell that to the makers of PackRat 5.0.

BRADLEY W. BLOCH writes on culture and technology.

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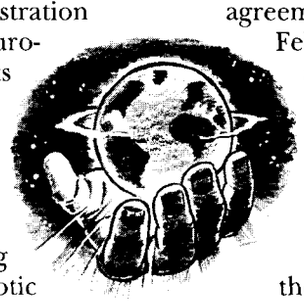
CALL TO ARMS

By Charles Lane

Should the arms embargo against Bosnia be lifted? For the first four months of his administration, President Clinton built his Balkan strategy around a "yes" answer. The idea was, roughly, to fortify the military capability of the Muslim-led Bosnian government and, hence, raise the odds of a relatively fair settlement between the government and the Bosnian Serbs. Clinton's plan was "lift and strike"—to end the embargo and support the Bosnians with air strikes while they re-armed. But the administration abandoned it after the British and French rejected Secretary of State Warren Christopher's muted pleas in May 1993.

Instead, for the last two years, the administration has been following Europe's lead. The European policy keeps the embargo and limits Western involvement to the use of neutral U.N. peacekeeping troops and humanitarian relief. Though rarely stated so baldly, the policy assumes that the West's interest lies not in punishing aggression, or in securing the integrity of Bosnia, but in muting intra-NATO squabbles and stabilizing the chaotic Balkans on just about any terms. (Just below the surface lies British and French fear of Muslim influence on the continent.) Since the Serbs are the strongest party, the best hope is to give them what they want. The Muslims' role is to accept their fate. The embargo pressures them to do just that.



It's clear now that this strategy has failed. The Serbs simply would not be appeased. They rejected both the 1993 Vance-Owen plan and the 1994 Contact Group plan, though both were accepted by Sarajevo and both ratified Serb ethnic cleansing. After the humiliating Serb hostage-taking in response to pinprick air strikes, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) has lost what remained of its humanitarian credibility: it bargained away the air strike option and assured Serbian commander General Ratko Mladic that its new "rapid reaction" force will leave him alone. The heavy weapons exclusion zone around Sarajevo has collapsed.

Basically, the Serbs rejected the peace plans because they felt strong enough to get away with it. "As long as the planet Earth has been in existence," Mladic has said, "borders between states and peoples have been determined by the shedding of blood and the cutting off of heads." Mladic's dealings with UNPROFOR only reinforce his view that no force on Earth can cut off more heads than his. Yet the British and French cling to their old strategy. And so does Clinton. Resisting Republican calls for a unilateral lifting of the embargo, he wants to help pay for the rapid reaction force, insisting the U.N. troops are still doing more good than harm. Vice President Al Gore claims, based on invisible evidence, that the five-nation Contact Group is "still making some progress toward a negotiated settlement."

Yet, while "unilateral lift" is certainly a morally defensible policy (Clinton himself labeled the embargo an "injustice" last year), it's not exactly the free lunch many Republicans seem to think. For one thing, it would exact a high price in diplomatic disruption. On the other hand, a modified version of "lift and strike," launched in concert with European allies, might still work. For a president who said April 11 that he'd favor a "multilateral lift" if "other measures fail to bring about a political settlement" this would require only some consistency—and a modicum of risk-tolerant cleverness.

One reason such a strategy might work is that, contrary to European expectations, the Bosnian Muslims have turned out not to be so weak. Their army survived both the initial Serbian onslaught and the bloody 1993-1994 Croat-Muslim war. Even the arms embargo has eroded over the last two years. When a U.S.-brokered agreement ended the Croat-Muslim struggle in February 1994, the Bosnian Army could once again import black-market weapons from Iran and elsewhere, via Croatia.

The Serb Army is on the strategic defensive. Spread across 70 percent of Bosnia, plagued by desertions and on uncertain terms with their suppliers in Belgrade, the Serbs can neither easily defend their turf, nor mount a tactical retreat without undermining morale. Since late 1994, when Muslim forces attempted to break out of the enclave at Bihac, the Bosnians have initiated most fighting. Around Sarajevo now, for example, a more aggressive Bosnian Army appears to be advancing. Croat gains against the Serbs in Croatia add to the momentum.

The Serbs retain one decisive advantage, however: heavy artillery and tanks. Until this advantage is neutralized, the balance of forces—a resurgent Bosnian-Croat alliance against a weary but still potent Serb Army—will remain a formula for bloody stalemate. The solution is to persuade the Europeans to amend, lift or sidestep the embargo and get heavy weapons to the Bosnians. It doesn't require a formal declaration by the U.N. Nor does it demand a massive U.S. airlift like the intentionally self-discrediting $5 billion "plan" that the pro-embargo Pentagon leaked last fall. If the British and French want to preserve plausible deniability, the transfers can be done semi-covertly—disguised as shipments to the Croats, perhaps. The Saudis have offered to buy East-bloc weapons for the Bosnian army. Such gear is compatible with what Bosnia has now; to use it wouldn't require much, if any, American training.

There are risks. "There would be an interval before the heavy weapons were delivered to the Bosnian gov-

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ernment and before they were trained in their use," Gore said recently, "during which the Serb forces would attempt to surge and overrun Sarajevo and the eastern enclaves of Gorazde, Srebrenica, Zepa, and the carnage could potentially be just horrific." Such a development could require retaining the threat of NATO air strikes—already allowed under U.N. resolutions—but not necessarily a massive campaign as envisioned in the original "lift and strike" proposal. Anyway, Gore's scenario "is a bit of a myth," according to a U.S. official who monitors the Bosnian forces. If the Serbs massed to take Srebrenica, they'd have to divert forces from elsewhere, exposing themselves to a counterstrike from Bosnian and Croatian troops. This is what happened last December, when the Serbs lost the town of Kupres to the Croats while they pushed back the Bosnians at Bihac.

More significant would be the impact on the U.N. peacekeepers. This has been the Europeans' trump card against lifting the embargo: their men are at risk, Americans aren't. But this threat, too, may be overblown. Many of the peacekeepers are deployed in Muslim-Croat areas, less exposed to Serb reprisals. The danger to the others could be reduced by intelligent redeployment: recalling U.N. military observers from scattered positions; declining to replace British and Dutch units in Srebrenica and Gorazde when their rotations expire this fall; and withdrawing the underequipped Bangladeshi battalion from Bihac. U.S. ground troops should assist in these relatively discrete tasks. It is the threat of air strikes, more than the presence of foreign troops, that has provided the "safe areas" what little security they now enjoy, as Professor Norman Cigar of the Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting points out in a recent paper points out for a modified "lift and strike."

Belgrade might intervene. But Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and his Yugoslav National Army are much weaker now than they were two years ago. Though Milosevic has continued to help the Bosnian Serbs, the power struggle between him and the Bosnian Serb leaders is real. Crippled by sanctions and enmeshed in a wrangle over borders with Croatia, the last thing Milosevic needs is full-scale war in Bosnia. He recently let the Croatians rout Croatian Serb forces from Western Slavonia. Having spent two years trying to get his Bosnian cousins to cut a deal, Milosevic might even secretly welcome new military pressure on them.

It's time for another high-level trip to Europe. Unlike Christopher's, the purpose would be to explain that the United States gave Europe's approach a shot and is now ready to chart a different course. It is prepared to use air cover and even a modest number of ground troops to protect European forces from threats that may arise when weapons begin to flow. The American objective would be pragmatic: to force the Serbs to negotiate, not to roll back all Serb conquests. Bill Clinton, understandably, is reluctant to open his re-election campaign with a new Bosnia policy. The payoff, however, could be a second term whose first 100 days are not consumed by yet another agonizing debate over how to stop the war in Bosnia. •

Running dry in Sarajevo.

WATER FIGHT

By Anna Husarska

SARAJEVO

There is no apparent reason why you should think about the Bosnian war victims when you flush your toilet. So why does the headline "SEVEN KILLED IN SARAJEVO SUBURB" suddenly turn your banal gesture into something all-important, something with relevance to the war in Bosnia? Because those seven people, now dead, were standing in line, hoping to collect in their bottles and jerricans some water to drink, to wash or to cook with, and these days their daily home consumption is roughly equivalent to the amount you flush every time you use the toilet. It is as simple as that.

In television pictures, we see Sarajevans mostly when they are running under Serb sniper fire or crouching along behind white U.N. armored cars in order to cross the street. But, until April 1992, Sarajevans were living a normal life, so civilized that flushing a toilet was a banal gesture for them, too. In fact, Sarajevo had a water distribution system, installed by the Turks, back in 1461, before the discovery of America.

The day after I arrived here a few weeks ago, my friend Jasna was all upset. "It's because of water," she said. Water? Of course she had no running water! Neither did I in the old town where I was staying at my friend Braco's apartment, and neither did any other Sarajevo resident I knew. This had been the case for the whole city since the end of May and intermittently since the beginning of the war more than three years ago. So even I, a visitor from outside, had long ago learned that, waterwise, it was more pragmatic first to wash and then to use the toilet. "What's the big deal?" I asked myself, although I knew it was a patronizing question that—once safely out of Sarajevo—I would be ashamed of.

It turned out that Jasna had special reasons for her consternation: a neighbor had knocked at her door in the middle of the night to announce that water was trickling from the tap. In no time, all in Jasna's household were on their feet, awakened by the beguiling prospect of immersing themselves in a bathtub, of taking a shower, of washing clothes, of filling every possible receptacle with the precious liquid. Jasna's mother went as far as emptying the bathtub of the water collected there long ago and used for rinsing so often that it was now good only for flushing the toilet. But, by the time the bathtub was empty, the water had stopped trickling. No wonder Jasna was upset. The rainwater her household had accumulated the week before was all it was left with.

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What Jasna felt was more humiliation than inconvenience. Her voice was breaking: "How can they do this to us?" "They," of course, are the Bosnian Serbs, who have been besieging the city since April 1992 and who have control over the water valves at Bačevo field, near the suburb called Ilidža. (Before the war, the wells at Bačevo supplied more than 80 percent of Sarajevo's drinking water.) The Bosnian Serbs can turn the water on and off as they please. And they more often please to turn it off than on.

The additional protocol to the Geneva Conventions reads: "It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as ... drinking water installations and supplies." But, then, there is probably no part of the Geneva Convention that the Bosnian Serbs have not violated.

"The use of water for offensive or defensive military purposes is an ancient strategy," says the International Committee of the Red Cross, which last year organized a symposium on the subject "Water in Armed Conflicts." But, as the Red Cross materials demonstrate, in no other war have water valves been used in such a premeditated way. From the point of view of the Serbs it is remarkably simple: as soon as they turn off the water, Sarajevans come out in the streets with their bottles and their jerricans on their shoulders or in wheelbarrows, pushcarts or baby prams and become easy targets for mortar fire and snipers. It is a way of smoking them out.

Photo by Gilles Peress/Magnum Photos

SARAJEVANS LINING UP FOR WATER.

The virtual Serb monopoly on Sarajevo's supply of drinking water is what prompted Fred Cuny, the founder of Intertect Relief and Reconstruction, to come up with an alternative source. In 1993, with funding from the Soros Foundation and practical help from the International Rescue Committee, his company designed and installed two emergency water purification plants, Miljacka and Mošcanica, which have been working for several months now. It was not an easy project: the plants were manufactured abroad and shipped into Sarajevo in pieces that fit into the fuselage of a C-130 plane. One of them was reassembled in a tunnel; the other had a carapace built around it with bricks from the destroyed restaurant "Mosčanica." The two plants that Cuny built produce 180 liters per second, ten times less than the Bačevo wells but a good deal more than the thirty-five liters per second produced by the Brewery, the only other source of drinking water in Sarajevo.

Many Sarajevans know that they owe the alternative water supply system to "Mister Cuny," and they asked me whether there was any word of his whereabouts since he disappeared in Chechnya in April. They would probably agree with the MacArthur Foundation that he is worthy of a "genius" award. By providing them with some water he restored to them some dignity.

It's clear, though, that even Cuny's ingenuity couldn't really solve Sarajevo's water crisis. Pierre Verstraelen, who is in charge of water at the Office of the Special Coordinator for Sarajevo, recently called to my attention another problem: since the airport has been closed for more than two months and the land roads are blocked by the Serbs, it is becoming increasingly difficult to get enough chlorine for water purification. And because so many pipes have been damaged by shelling, about 70 percent of the water is lost due to leakage. Now, leakage *out* means leakage *in*, which is why purification is so important. At the beginning of the war, when Sarajevans relied on hand pumps, they had little purification pills: white for two liters and green for five liters. The trick was to get ahold of a jerrican whose volume corresponded to the color of the pill you had. Otherwise, you had a painful dilemma.

And there's another glitch: the distribution network for the water from Cuny-made purification plants runs on diesel, which is also in short supply, so the water is diverted to several spigot points in the city rather than into the municipal water system (the latter would use more diesel). Those spigot points are what Serbs aim for.

Since I was a guest in a regular Sarajevo home, I made it a point to bring a jerrican of water every day. But then my friend Seo managed to get a few liters of gas, and we drove to the Brewery in Seo's car, which we piled high with huge water containers destined for Braco's apartment and for Jasna's parents (who needed cheering up after their night of false hope), with a few plastic bottles to fill for an elderly neighbor and with jerricans for Seo's in-laws. It is difficult to imagine the joy that descended upon us all when we actually collected our water: Braco shaved, we watered the scallions on the balcony (the seeds were brought in last spring through another of Cuny's pet projects), Jasna did some laundry, Braco's girlfriend washed her hair. I knew I would be leaving Sarajevo shortly so I could afford to be chivalrous and remain slightly on the dirty side. It was like the scene in a classic Sarajevo joke about Suyo (Suleiman) and Muyo (Mustafa): Suyo comes to visit Muyo. "Coffee?" offers Muyo. "No, thanks, I just had one," says Suyo. Muyo beams: "Oh, good, then I'll be able to take a shower." •

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WE'VE FOUND SOME INFORMATION THAT MAY BE A REVELATION TO THE CHRISTIAN COALITION.

A recent public opinion poll showed that a larger percentage of Americans believe in God and participate regularly in religious devotions than any other advanced industrial nation.

But another poll showed that 52% of Americans believe that federal government power threatens the rights of individuals.

The revelation?

Putting these two polls together, it's clear that while Americans want religion to flourish, they also want to keep the government out of their personal lives.

That's what the First Amendment does, and why recent proposals to change it – like the one being put forth by the Christian Coalition – are so dangerous.

If a child in public school wants to say grace before eating in the cafeteria, she has that right under the First Amendment as it exists today. But the school may not allow an official grace ceremony that subjects all of the students to religious beliefs that their families may not share.

Parents don't need the government to tell their children where, how, when or whether to pray.

The ACLU has been defending principles like this for 75 years. We respect the many different religious beliefs of Americans. That's why we work to protect them all from government interference.

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THE MAJOR AND THE MINOR

By Martin Walker

Following the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, Britain's Prime Minister Anthony Eden, a statesman of international reputation, was driven to resign. After a vicious leadership battle, Harold Macmillan was catapulted into Downing Street and, against the odds, managed to win re-election in 1959. Macmillan battled through a crisis over Britain's role in Europe, a series of spats with his American allies, economic slumps and sporadic party revolts. He then headed for a new election against a rejuvenated Labor Party as sleaze and scandal and ominous official inquiries piled up on him.

Seen in these terms, Macmillan's situation bears some striking parallels to John Major's today. Indeed, the parallels are compelling enough to suggest that we are witnessing the re-enactment of a Tory pathology. The assault on Major—who has decided, under pressure, to step down as leader of the Conservative Party and run for the post again—is more than just a reflexive lunge for a scapegoat. Devoted to the monarchic principle, Tories revert in time of crisis to the cult of the royal sacrifice. But, if the king must die for the sake of the party, it is as well to be sure which king is at issue. The peculiar agony of the current British government is to be in the grip of divided loyalties in which John Major is almost beside the point. He is the accidental man who emerged because the real struggle, between Margaret Thatcher and Michael Heseltine, was too awful for the party to contemplate when it ditched her back in 1990.

Britain's Conservatives most resemble American Republicans in the way that the class roots of the party are changing fast, as the patricians and corporate leaders and country club gentry of the past give way to populists of vibrant new regions, to the self-made men and the New Rich. British Tories have their Essex Man, named after the county to which ambitious working-class Londoners aspire, the Republicans have their new Southern base, and both are tough-minded. The Conservatives used to believe in noblesse oblige and in the duty to govern in the name of One Nation. Margaret Thatcher's crucial party victory was to turn out the old patricians and bring in her new Essex Men, John Major prime among them. Major is a man who left school at the age of 16, failed the compulsory mathematics exam that would have entitled him to become a bus conductor and went to work for the Standard Bank—displaying a combination of economic illiteracy and financial skill that makes him a classic candidate for the Essex fraternity.

Michael Heseltine was not born a patrician, either, but, through Oxford and the Brigade of Guards and a lucrative publishing venture, he has become the next best thing, with a country estate to prove it. He believes in One Nation, in the duty of government to redeem the inner cities and help chart the strategic course of the economy, and he believes that Britain's future lies with Europe. On each of these issues, and in the personal clash between Thatcher and Heseltine, who can each bring the annual Tory Party conference to their feet in noisy devotion, Heseltine is Thatcher's natural rival.

Her last act as prime minister in 1990 was to deny Heseltine the succession by throwing her weight behind Major. The new leadership crisis is the resumption of that clash, because John Major has not lived up to Thatcher's expectations. Over the past month, she has deliberately turned the constantly simmering revolt of the party's small band of Euro-skeptics into a mortal challenge that Major has now had the courage to accept.

Two weeks ago, Thatcher launched her second volume of memoirs, *The Path to Power*, which is full of scorn for Major's retreat from her dogmatic opposition to European unity, by granting a TV interview with David Frost. She delivered a call to arms. "I was turned out because I said to Europe, 'no, no, no.' That 'no, no, no' was turned into 'yes, yes,' " she began. Then she stepped up her critique: "John Major fought the last election on policies I agreed with—low taxation and more incentives for those who work hard and look after their families. That hasn't been quite how it turned out."

Thatcher's attempt to broaden the anti-Major forces beyond the Euro-skeptics betrays a dreadful paradox. The Euro-skeptics may just have it in their power to force John Major out. But his likeliest heir would then be Heseltine, who is far warmer to Europe than Major. Tactical victory would result in strategic defeat.

Beyond the neuralgic issue of Europe, it is not easy to mount a convincing Conservative argument against

MARTIN WALKER is U.S. bureau chief for Britain's *The Guardian* and author of *The Cold War: A History* (Henry Holt).

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SOME SURPRISING FACTS ABOUT AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD GAY RIGHTS HAVE JUST COME OUT.

A recent public opinion poll showed that more than three-quarters of Americans believe that a relationship between two people of the same sex is their own business, that lesbians and gay men are just as capable as heterosexuals when it comes to job performance, and that many forms of discrimination are wrong.

The surprising part?

Even 80% of people who severely disapprove of lesbian and gay relationships also believe that such relationships are a private matter, and many express strong support for gay and lesbian rights.

The ACLU is encouraged by that because we think that, like race and gender, sexual orientation should not determine whether you get a job, are admitted to a school, are allowed to form a family or serve your country.

We are pleased that most Americans seem to agree with this. And we are especially pleased that so many of them are able to put aside their personal feelings about lesbian and gay relationships, and recognize the principle of individual liberty.

The ACLU has been defending the right of individual liberty for 75 years. If you'd like more information about our work in defense of lesbian and gay rights, and the ACLU in general, call or write for our "Liberty Packet #2."

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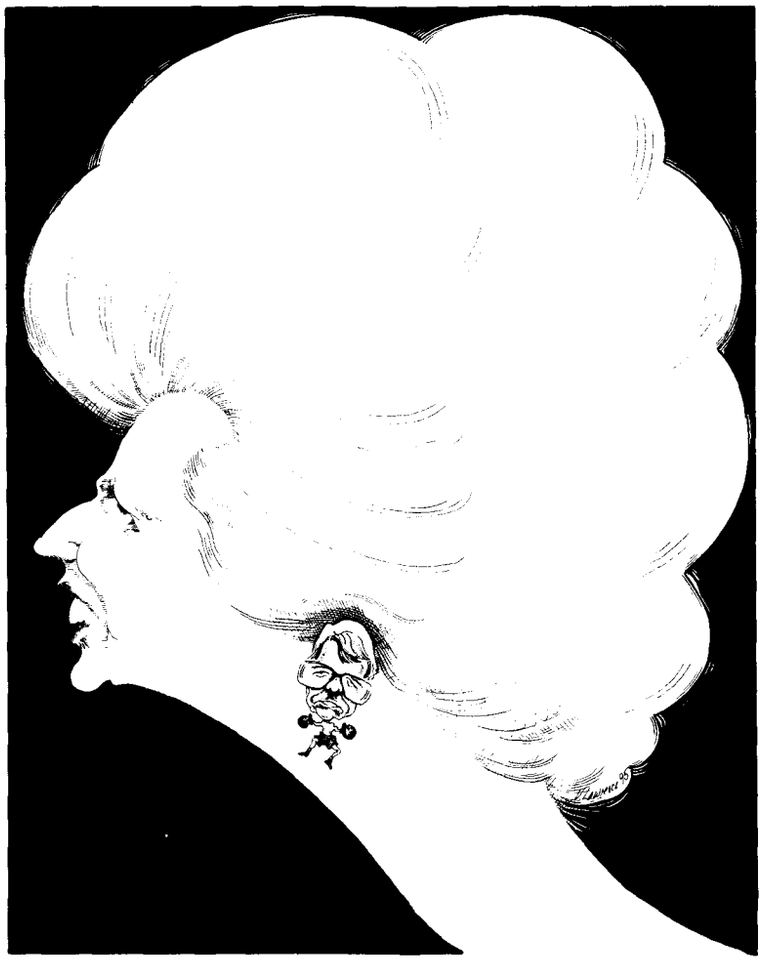
John Major's record. Although he and his party's dismal showing in the opinion polls and in successive municipal and by-elections shroud the fact, John Major has been by most standards an impressive prime minister. Against the odds, he won re-election in 1992, at the depths of a recession. He has now delivered the fruits of Thatcher's entrepreneurial revolution of the 1980s with the healthiest economic performance Britain has known for a generation. The country is enjoying export-led GDP growth of more than 3 percent a year. Unemployment is down to the German level of just more than 8 percent, inflation is low, and the most recent figures suggest that a heartening investment boom is under way. After the self-destruction of the British motor industry, the country is again a net exporter of cars, thanks to the Thatcher-Major success in coaxing the Japanese into treating Britain as their low-wage manufacturing beachhead in Europe.



JOHN MAJOR BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Major has shown both vision and courage in bringing Northern Ireland tantalizingly close to peace and a political settlement. He has not solved the Bosnian imbroglio, but, unlike President Clinton, he has at least put his troops where his rhetoric is. On Europe, Major has compromised with some skill. He secured Britain's right to duck two key provisions of the Maastricht Treaty, the social charter and the single European currency. Even his (and Thatcher's) strategy of countering a federal Europe with General de Gaulle's *Europe des patries* (Europe of nation-states) is looking rather promising now that Gaullist Jacques Chirac is president of France.

Ironically, Thatcher's courageous support for the European single market, and for a wider Europe that would include Prague, Budapest and Warsaw, made her the most visionary of Europeans in the 1980s. She now fears the Brussels momentum has gone too far and that John Major does not have the backbone to stop it.

The question is, how many Tories believe her? There are 329 Tory MPs who may vote in the leadership contest on July 4. Only a dozen are die-hard foes of Europe. Another thirty can be counted as Euro-skeptics. They want Major to go but not if Heseltine replaces him.

"Our best current estimate is that between twenty and fifty MPs will vote for any challenger to Major, and another thirty to seventy will abstain," says one close Thatcher adviser. "Fewer than seventy votes against or abstentions, and Major will probably survive, his position strengthened by the uncharacteristic boldness of his challenge to put up or shut up. More than 100, and his position looks untenable. The numbers will depend on how many of Heseltine's supporters vote against Major, or abstain, in order to force a new round of voting."

The outcome will rest with that perennial Tory majority, the self-preservation faction, who will back whichever candidate will protect most of the party's seats at the next election. The most likely beneficiary will be either Heseltine, or perhaps Chancellor of the Exchequer Kenneth Clark, in the faint possibility that he emerges as a compromise savior.

Cabinet and Tory etiquette prevent Heseltine from standing in the first round. Such etiquette, however, has not deterred Secretary for Wales John Redwood, 44, who used to run Thatcher's Policy Unit think tank before he entered Parliament in 1987. Nicknamed "Vulcan" (after the home planet of Mr. Spock and other "Star Trek" characters) for his cold intelligence and gloomy demeanor, Redwood makes forced jokes about "getting back to my spaceship" and lists among his hobbies "not reading *The Guardian*." Redwood is battling for the Thatcherite succession with the even younger (42) and stridently right-wing Employment Secretary Michael Portillo, who is prepared to threaten British withdrawal from Europe rather than surrender the pound.

Major's absence from the centers of London intrigue this week—he was attending a Euro-summit in Cannes—gave Redwood some running room. That absence may also tempt Portillo into the fray, which in turn would make the first ballot on July 4 far more than a merely

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WE JUST **SMOKED** OUT SOME SURPRISING **FACTS** ABOUT AMERICANS WHO **OPPOSE** USING **MARIJUANA.**

In a recent public opinion poll, we learned that a majority of Americans believe that smoking marijuana is morally wrong.

The surprising part?

40% of those same Americans said that despite what they think, they also believe that individuals ought to have the right to decide for themselves what they do with marijuana in the privacy of their own homes.

Overall, 55% of American voters believe that.

In other words, it's none of the government's business.

That means that it's wrong for the police to be breaking down doors and arresting people for growing or smoking marijuana privately, or for using it as medicine to relieve pain or nausea or the symptoms of diseases like glaucoma or multiple sclerosis.

The ACLU has been defending principles like this for 75 years, and we applaud the conviction of those Americans who recognize that it's wrong for the government to arrest people for using marijuana in their own homes.

If you'd like more information about the ACLU's positions on drug policy, and the ACLU in general, call or write for our "Liberty Packet #4."

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symbolic affair. Tory disaffection with Major could reward Redwood's boldness, but a second ballot now looks likely, and the longer this process continues, the worse for Major. Whatever the outcome—Major versus Heseltine, Heseltine versus Redwood or Portillo, or any combination thereof—the woman at the core of all this will not be on the ballot herself.

Earlier this year, Margaret Thatcher breezed into the tail end of a Washington dinner party, just having addressed a gathering of Republicans who were celebrating Ronald Reagan's eighty-fourth birthday. "It struck me that dear Ronnie was just 69 when he entered the White House. And I am just 69 now," she confided with that Thespian sense of timing that summons thoughts of an actress turned dowager Duchess. "And, do you know, I am feeling a trifle underemployed."

She was back in Washington again this week. (Major's timing in calling the leadership election took careful account of Thatcher's travel plans.) Holding court at the farewell ball for the outgoing British Ambassador Sir Robin Renwick, she insisted that she had no plans to return to the political fray. Yet her new book suggests differently: "It is not that the world had turned away from my kind of conservatism, but rather that conservatives themselves in some countries had temporarily lost confidence in themselves and their message."

Her friends suggest that she knows the game is up, at least for the moment. Whatever happens in this leadership election, the tired and demoralized Conservatives are probably heading for defeat at the next general election (which may be held at any time of the prime minister's choice before May 1997). Thatcher's last battle will then follow, as she plots to secure an eventual succession for an Essex Man who will never go wobbly. The ghost of the deposed Queen Margaret will haunt the Tories into the next century. •

Class vs. race, round 2.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY CRITICS

By Richard D. Kahlenberg

On April 9, House Speaker Newt Gingrich appeared on "Face the Nation" and made an extraordinary statement about affirmative action. After remarking that he opposed race-based preferences (no surprise) he said, "I'd rather talk about how do we replace group affirmative action with effective help for individuals, rather than just talk about wiping out affirmative action by itself."

Gingrich proposed providing special help for people "who come out of poor neighborhoods, who come out of poor backgrounds, who go to schools in poor counties." The statement, which is at odds with much of Gingrich's legislative record, went largely unreported. Perhaps the press simply didn't believe his newfound concern for the poor. But logically Gingrich's statement flows directly from one of the classic criticisms of affirmative action: How is it fair to give a black doctor's son a preference over a white coal miner's daughter? Implicit in this critique is the sense not only that race shouldn't count but also that maybe class should.

If the press didn't make much of Gingrich's statement, his argument—and similar talk of class-based preferences from other conservative politicians—does have some conservative intellectuals worried. For years, conservatives such as Clarence Thomas and Dinesh D'Souza have been championing the argument that class should replace race as the basis for preferences. Now that the idea has actually gained some currency, however, conservatives, conservative intellectuals especially, are starting to knock it. On June 11, Abigail Thernstrom wrote an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* titled, "A CLASS BACKWARDS IDEA: WHY AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR THE NEEDY WON'T WORK." Her views echoed those of Nathan Glazer, whose earlier article in *The Wall Street Journal*, "RACE, NOT CLASS," rejected the notion of class-based affirmative action. This new conservative critique of class-based preferences goes to both the idea's feasibility and its philosophical underpinnings.

First, Thernstrom and Glazer both argue, class-based preferences won't work well in education, employment and contracting—the three major areas where race-based preferences are currently in use. In education, they argue, as do some liberal critics of the class-based model, class-based preferences will fail to produce an adequate number of minority students in selective universities. A University of California study released in May seemed to bolster their case. It found that class-based preferences would provide only small increases in

RICHARD D. KAHLENBERG is writing a book on class-based affirmative action for Basic Books. His article, "Class, Not Race," appeared in the April 3 issue of TNR.

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WE JUST CHANGED SOME OF OUR PRE-CONCEIVED NOTIONS ABOUT AMERICANS WHO OPPOSE ABORTION.

In a recent public opinion poll, we confirmed that a majority of Americans disapprove of abortion.

The surprising part?

More than 73% of those same Americans said that despite what they personally think, they also believe that each woman should have the right to make that decision for herself.

In other words, it's none of the government's business.

That means politicians shouldn't be able to pass laws that force women to have children they don't want, or prevent them from having children they do want.

The ACLU has been defending principles like this for 75 years, and we applaud the conviction of the overwhelming majority of Americans who can look past their own personal views and recognize that it's wrong to interfere with a woman's right to control her own body.

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minority representation over a system that weighs strictly academic achievement. Preferences based on parental income and education, the study found, would result in black representation at Berkeley of at most 2.3 percent and Hispanic enrollment of at most 10 percent. By comparison, at Berkeley today, 6 percent of students are black and 14 percent Hispanic.

The problem is that, while blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately poor and should therefore disproportionately benefit from class preferences, they tend to do worse on the SAT than whites and Asians who come from the same income group. Both liberals and conservatives have simply ended the argument there. Left lingering is the suggestion that, if the tests are accurate, something must be "wrong" with blacks. But it's important to go further and ask why blacks generally do worse than whites of the same income. One major reason is that income, by itself, doesn't fully reflect economic position. Other factors, such as household wealth and concentration of poverty, also matter. Generally speaking, blacks are more economically disadvantaged than whites of the same income group.

First, net worth differences between racial groups are much larger than income differences. While median black income hovers around 60 percent of white income, median black household wealth is only 9 percent of the white median. Researchers have found that black households with incomes between $45,000 and $60,000 have a lower mean net worth than white households with incomes between $7,500 and $15,000. What is responsible for these differences? Most likely, several factors: the impact of past housing discrimination; the recent arrival of many black families to the middle class and the resulting lack of inherited capital; and the greater persistence of poverty among black families than among white families.

In addition, black poverty is generally much more concentrated than white poverty. Poor blacks are six times as likely to live in areas with high concentrations of poverty as poor whites, and black children disproportionately suffer from that increased burden in their schools and neighborhoods. Counting these factors and others into a class-based preference system would both make the program more equitable and increase African American representation. Under such a system, all minority students who got a preference would be students from disadvantaged backgrounds; and it is the disadvantaged, of course, who are most likely to suffer from the continuing legacy of past discrimination, while least likely to be helped by current race-based programs. There is in the end no more efficient way to guarantee proportionate racial representation than setting quotas based on skin color; but, if the goal is to provide a fair system of equal opportunity, factoring in class does a much better job than either filling racial quotas or looking solely at academic numbers.

When it comes to employment, critics of class-based preferences have mocked the idea with extravagant and absurd stories about how it might work. Thernstrom says that if family background is considered, "a handicapped mother, an alcoholic father, a depressed sister and a drug-dealing brother would all be pluses ... candidates for jobs would be eagerly telling tales of the dreadful dysfunctional families whence they came." Jeffrey Rosen, writing in these pages ("Affirmative Action: A Solution," May 8), pointed out how ridiculous it would be for a sharecropper's son, ten years into his job, to receive a preference in promotion to office manager over a peer with a more privileged childhood.

These criticisms point to two basic rules about class-based preferences in employment: the preferences should be based on quantifiable and verifiable indices of disadvantage; and consideration of economic background makes most sense in entry-level positions for those starting off in life, rather than in subsequent lateral moves or promotions of older workers.

Quantifiable measures of disadvantage—such as parents' income and concentration of poverty in one's high school—must be the only criteria, since imprecise, touchy-feely references to "a depressed sister" or "drug-dealing brother" are open to manipulation and dispute. Many government programs, including student loans and the Earned Income Tax Credit, use objective, quantifiable indicators to determine who should benefit. Class-based programs should stick with hard data. There's plenty of it.

In addition, preferences apply with greatest force to entry-level positions open to those just beginning their adult lives for both moral and practical reasons. From a moral perspective, the obstacles and disadvantages stemming from class are for the youngest adults not in any sense of their own making. An adolescent's poverty is as beyond his control as is his race, so preferences for teenage job applicants render moot the debate over how much adult poverty is the fault of the individual and how much of society. Adolescents are, of course, responsible for their own actions, but they aren't responsible for their class or socioeconomic status, or for the disadvantages that stem from that status. A teenager from a lower-class background should get the benefit of a preference; only those who as individuals work hard and apply themselves should advance from within the group to whom such preferences have been awarded.

On grounds of efficiency, the age of the job seeker is also important. If a corporate board is deciding between two 60-year-olds for the position of chief executive officer, efficiency surely dictates that one choose the individual who has a track record of producing the most; past record, in that case, is a fairly accurate predictor of future potential. But, in deciding which of two 18-year-olds to hire for an entry-level position, the future potential of the applicant, with three-quarters of her life ahead of her, is partly guesswork. A look at obstacles such a person has faced, in addition to her past track record, is surely a relevant consideration in determining long-run potential. In promotions, where the case for preferences has always been much weaker than it has been in hiring, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1991 will continue to

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8	Variable Resistance on Arm Exercise Poles and Tread	YES Adjusts to your personal resistance level with a simple twist of a dial. Arm pole resistance is 2-way — push *and* pull — for maximum workout.	YES **BUT...**WalkFit costs more than *twice as much* as **HEALTHMAX**!
9	Electronic Workout Computer and Pulse Monitor	YES Full-function computer tracks your workout progress and heart rate — for optimum, *safe* exercise.	YES They've finally added a pulse monitor. Give up the wood base, YOU STILL PAY $599! Give up the pulse monitor *AND* the wood, YOU STILL PAY $499!
10	Folds for Easy Storage	YES Easily folds to just 53" long by 21" wide by only 11" high!	YES **BUT...**When folded, it's still 53" long by 24" wide by a cumbersome 18" high.
11	Comes Virtually Fully Assembled	YES Simply attach monitor and 3 knobs, and you're ready to go!	NO Requires more extensive assembly.

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address racial and gender discrimination.

Finally, in the field of government contracting, critics argue that class-based preferences make little sense. While a poor kid may succeed in college, Nathan Glazer asks, "Could a poor contractor fulfill the contract?" But race-neutral, class-based preferences can nevertheless be appropriately tailored. One possibility would be to devise policies aimed at helping those companies headed by individuals who are disadvantaged relative to the competition. Alternatively, the policies could benefit either companies that employ workers who are disadvantaged, or companies that are located in disadvantaged Census tracts. The first scenario may occur naturally, thanks to the Supreme Court's recent decision in *Adarand Constructors* v. *Pena*. The Court allowed room for preferences for companies owned by "socially and economically disadvantaged" individuals; thus, even if the racial component of the preference is diminished, programs to help small struggling businesses will remain.

The second notion—helping companies that employ disadvantaged workers—may be even more promising. It has even been proposed or implemented already by a few mayors. In 1994, Philadelphia Mayor Edward G. Rendell proposed that 15 percent of federal contracts be set aside in a race-neutral manner to companies that operate in depressed urban areas. As far back as 1980, Mayor Edward I. Koch instituted a (now defunct) affirmative action program in New York City based on economic deprivation. The program established a 10 percent subcontracting set-aside for small firms located in New York City that conducted at least 25 percent of their business in depressed areas or employed (as 25 percent of their work force) economically disadvantaged workers.

The philosophical conservative's critique of class-based affirmative action says that such an approach is unnecessary. Thernstrom, for example, argues that class-based preferences will "simply exacerbate the already serious problem of victim status creep." Instead, she suggests, "those who truly care about the less fortunate will embrace quite a different policy—one that delivers the message that, black or white, rich or poor, with effort and discipline the chances are good you can make it. America is a land of opportunity. It's a message of hope, and it's even true."

Thernstrom appears to have chosen her words carefully. For the claim that America is the "land of opportunity" is quite different than the more ambitious Amer-

School colors

Many observers hailed the Supreme Court's decision last month in *Adarand Constructors* v. *Pena*, which toughened the legal standard by which federal set-aside programs for minorities are judged, as the death of all affirmative action. (See "The End of Affirmative Action," The Editors, July 3.) In fact, though, the Court had surprisingly little to say in that decision about one of the most contentious arenas of affirmative action, admissions to state universities. And for good reason. Opposing affirmative action in the awarding of government contracts while defending it in university admissions is a more than tenable position.

The last time the Court addressed affirmative action in the university context was, famously, in the 1978 *Bakke* case. After Allan Bakke, a white man, was twice rejected from U.C.-Davis Medical School, he filed suit contending that the university's special admissions program for minorities was a quota that had excluded him on the basis of race. The Court, in a fractured opinion, struck down the quota program on a combination of constitutional and statutory grounds.

But the upholding of Bakke's claim was only the first part of the Court's ruling. The Court also noted, in now-familiar language, that diversity may be a constitutionally proper goal in the university context and that, while U.C.-Davis could not use a racial quota system, it could take race into consideration in its admissions decisions. Justice Lewis Powell, the swing vote and author of the most influential of the six opinions offered in *Bakke*, even attached an appendix detailing the practices of the Harvard College Admissions Program, which did not use quotas but did allow race to "tip the balance" in some cases because "diversity adds an essential ingredient to the educational process." Powell, along with four other justices, held that such non-quota schemes could pass constitutional muster.

Today state university administrators around the country are wondering whether *Bakke* is still good law. In *Adarand*, in an opinion written by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the Court overruled its 1990 decision in *Metro Broadcasting Inc.* v. *Federal Communications Commission*, which judged federal affirmative action by a relatively relaxed standard. But O'Connor's opinion was vague about *Bakke*. On the one hand, she said "all racial classifications, imposed by whatever federal, state or local governmental actor, must be analyzed by a reviewing court under strict scrutiny." Yet, in propounding this nominally harsher test, she watered it down to say "strict scrutiny does take 'relevant differences' into account"—an open invitation to think about education in different terms than construction contracts. As the dissent by Justice John Paul Stevens pointed out, the decision said nothing about "fostering diversity" because the issue was not even "remotely presented."

More generally, O'Connor carefully crafted the *Adarand* opinion in light of her 1992 *Casey* decision, which argued against overruling longstanding cases around which major social expectations have crystallized. Thus *Casey* affirmed *Roe* v. *Wade*, while overruling less important cases that came in its wake. By this test, *Bakke* is arguably more like *Roe* and should stand even after the less important *Metro Broadcasting* is tossed out. (Only O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy used this test in *Adarand*, but they hold the two most crucial votes, as the *Casey* and *Adarand* rulings prove.) There is, therefore, some reason to think that the Court's recent decision may not really be the end of affirmative action, at least in education—especially since, in a number of essential ways, universities are different from government contracting.

First, set-aside contracts are often given to minority-controlled corporations, not individuals. As such, they are highly susceptible to fraud, for in some cases, minorities may be present only as figureheads to gain government

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ican goal of "equal opportunity." Thernstrom cannot argue that a kid growing up in a ghetto, a barrio or a trailer park, consigned to grinding poverty and lousy schools, has anything approaching equality of opportunity, and so the goal is adjusted downward; we now seek mere opportunity, which presumably is satisfied when, once in a while, poor kids go on to achieve dramatic success.

In a 1979 study, sociologist Christopher Jencks of Northwestern University found that: "If we define 'equal opportunity' as a situation in which sons born into different families have the same chances of success, our data show that America comes nowhere near achieving it.... The sons of the most advantaged fifth could expect to earn 150 to 186 percent of the national average, while the sons of the least advantaged fifth could expect to earn 56 to 67 percent of the national average." A 1991 study, by economist David Zimmerman, found that only 12 percent of boys born into the bottom quartile rose as adults to the top quartile. Sixty-nine percent were in the lower half. The correlation between father's and son's income is almost identical for the United States and Britain.

Most Americans know that the deck is stacked against poor kids. They also realize that, because of past discrimination, an extraordinary number of those facing unequal opportunities are black. So, while 75 percent of Americans oppose racial preferences, according to a 1995 *Washington Post*/ABC poll, two-thirds wish to "change" affirmative action programs rather than "do away with them entirely." Most Americans applaud the *Adarand* decision to reserve race-based preferences for those rare cases where they are unquestionably justified as a direct and temporary remedy for proven discrimination. But the public also realizes that, in real life, the legacy of discrimination is not always so neat. It is diffuse, and it requires a broader remedy.

Newt Gingrich and other conservative politicians know this. They realize that, even though conservatives may be in sync with most Americans on racial preferences, they are out of sync on the class question. The emerging split between conservative politicians, who embrace class preferences, and conservative intellectuals, many of whom do not, suggests that class-based affirmative action is at root a philosophically liberal idea that is likely to garner broad popular support. Newt Gingrich has figured this out. When will the Democrats? •

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contracts. Affirmative action in admissions, on the other hand, operates directly on an individual level. (Both schemes pose similarly thorny issues when it comes to proving minority status: How do you prove that you're really one-eighth black? Should Aleuts count?) In addition, those who award set-aside contracts are often politicians or political appointees, an arrangement that doesn't exactly inspire confidence that the programs will reach their targeted groups. Professional educators, with no comparable need to cater to voting blocs, should in theory be less inclined to play racial pork-barrel politics.

Second, contracts are essentially jobs that the government wants done. The goal is simply to carry out a task, not to create a new government entitlement. When the government contracts with a company to provide goods and services, it is not handing out "goodies"; it is, or should be, getting a job done at the lowest cost. Here, the government's sole concern should be awarding the contract to the lowest bidder. Education, on the other hand, is principally about investing citizens with skills. Its real value accrues only to those who work and learn, which means that those who benefit from it do not reap unfair rewards. In the *Adarand* case, a contractor was paid, in effect, a cash bonus just for being a minority. A cash bonus is a blatant race-based handout, while a seat in a chemistry class is a hand-up. What's more, a wider range of people are helped by preferences in education than by set-asides, which are notorious for benefiting primarily middle- or even upper-class blacks. How many minorities own construction companies?

Third, contracts are awarded to people throughout their adult years and have no logical stopping point. University education typically occurs early in life and then *ends*. Higher education, by making up for educational inequities at early stages in life, can be the ramp to a level playing field—with no further affirmative action—for the rest of your future. It also partially compensates for educational grandfather clauses, the admissions preferences granted to the offspring of the college's alumni. (This is one of the non-merit-based criteria the merit proponents don't seem to talk much about.)

In the end these differences may not be entirely convincing. After all, Allan Bakke and other whites may still feel slighted by virtue of their race. But, before agreeing with this, we should stop to ponder the biggest difference of all. Set-asides compartmentalize people by their race; "black firms" win contracts and "white firms" do not. Set-asides can actually encourage segregation and reward wholly unintegrated minority firms. Education, by contrast, unites people from different walks of life. Instead of atomized corporations fulfilling various contracts, the educational context brings individuals together in an environment where they can mingle with and learn from each other.

There is a way to make affirmative action a gentler, more benevolent force in society than the rigid set-aside. Set-asides don't help in the great American goal of integration, a goal cherished by the Court's historic 1954 decision in *Brown* v. *Board of Education*. Instead, they are a recipe for "black" and "white" firms, with no mixture between the two. Integrated education, on the other hand, doesn't just benefit minorities, it benefits all students.

As Powell wrote in *Bakke*, "The 'nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure' to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation of many peoples." *Adarand*-like set asides set us apart. *Bakke*-like affirmative action on the Harvard model brings us together. Until and unless the Court says otherwise, *Bakke* stands as the law of the land.

AKHIL AMAR and NEAL KATYAL

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WHY AMERICANS DON'T SAVE

By Thomas Geoghegan

I.

It's a puzzle: as a recent World Bank study claims, the people in the U.S. have the highest "average" income in the world—or the second highest, next to Luxembourg. But to many it seems we have no money and no savings, that our Social Security may collapse and that we won't have anything to live on in our old age. How can this be?

I look at my own IRA and groan. People my age, in their 40s, are saving at less than a third the rate our parents did. Or so say some economists. Others say no, it's people over 50 who aren't saving. Somebody isn't. Is it you?

I know, I get sick of the alarms, too. "Social Security will collapse." "The world will end." And it never does. But I'm a pension lawyer, and I talk to other pension lawyers. "I think," one of them said, "this really is it." And, if they do get around to cutting Social Security, whose will they cut first? Won't it be yours, you who practice law or who think you're "elite"? Are you ready for that? Instead of playing golf at 78, do you want to work at Montgomery Ward? Once I thought of Social Security as, I must admit, sort of a white-trash benefit. But now, seriously, I'd kind of like to *have* it.

How could this have happened?

March 2, 1995. (I should start keeping a journal like Shirer's *Berlin Diary*. I guess somebody is.) Today they almost passed the balanced budget amendment, which could have shattered the Republic—not to mention affect my Social Security.

Shouldn't I be taking out an IRA? No, I should have done that years ago. Now at 46, it is, as they say in the financial magazines, almost too late to start. Too late! Damn it, I knew this would happen, too.

When I was in college, in the 1960s, I used to look at the *Self-Portrait* by the German expressionist Max Beckmann. In the painting, it's late Weimar, or even later. Beckmann, in a tuxedo, is holding a cigarette and just staring, staring: bald, middle-aged and somehow implicated in the Evil. At 19, I'd stand in front of Beckmann's painting and think, "When I'm 40, that's how I'll look. It'll be late Weimar all over again, and I'll be bald, staring, implicated." But, when I did turn 40, it seemed as if nothing would really happen. I was still jogging, and drinking Evian, just as I did in college. I still didn't read, yet, *Longevity* magazine. Yet, out there in the U.S., the wages were falling. It was getting darker. And all this time, like a fool, I didn't save. Now I might not even have Social Security. No, that's crazy. Of course I will.

But in my mind I see a picture of the House Republicans marching on the Senate, waving their fists and shouting. Only I can't hear them, because I've rented a tux like Beckmann's, and I'm standing in front of a mirror, wondering what I'm going to do.

II.

Of course, I could move to Europe. That's one option. "You don't *need* a job," my friend Joe-Tom has been saying. "You just need enough money for three months, and then something will turn up." Let's suppose, then, I could leave. What about my fellow Americans, the bottom 80 percent? "Only a coward would leave now," I tell myself.

Still, by virtue of my occupation, I should know what's coming. Since 1979, the hourly wage, along with nearly every other index, has been falling. At first it was small, but now there's panic. Some people, the Cato Institute types, are still in denial.

"Well, household income is falling because there are more divorces."

"But more people have jobs."

And what about the hourly wage? And median family income? And aren't people working longer hours? Finally, what about savings?

Here we have to distinguish between "national" savings and "personal" savings. "National" savings have fallen, obviously, because of the huge budget deficit. But it doesn't necessarily follow that "personal" savings should drop. Even if median income has fallen, total income in the U.S. is going up. If the rich are much, much richer, you would even think that personal savings would increase. Or that we would be saving more for retirement.

THOMAS GEOGHEGAN, a lawyer in Chicago, is the author of *Which Side Are You On: Trying to Be for Labor When It's Flat on Its Back* (Plume).

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But it seems that both national and personal savings rates are falling. And there's not enough money for retirement, either. Why? One school of thought blames baby-boomers for failing to put away a mere third of what they need for retirement. Another school blames the boomers' parents for not saving enough for retirement.

Let's start with the drop in the big one, the national savings rate. By one standard measure, the U.S. in the 1950s had a savings rate of 7 percent. That wasn't much, even then, compared to the current rate of 12 percent in Germany or 17 percent in Japan. But we're Americans. This is the U.S. Every day here, ever since the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, has been the Day of the Locust. So it was impressive, at the time, to have a rate of 7 percent.

Then the net national savings rate began to drop. We busted unions, we pushed down wages and we started screaming for tax cuts. By the Reagan era, the rate was down to 3 percent. By the 1990s, it was 1.8 percent. In other words, we now have a net national savings rate of about 1 percent. (Remember, we in the U.S. have the highest "average" incomes in the world, although that "average" includes Michael Jordan and Bill Gates.) How could our savings rate be so low?

It wasn't just the government borrowing too much. The personal savings rate since the 1950s has dropped by a third (when you figure it as a percentage of disposable income). With all the rich at the top, and the huge haul of money up there, you might have figured that at least the personal savings rate would have shot up in the new top-heavy United States. But, no, we're only at 4 percent, behind the Germans, the Japanese and most others. Even the Belgians are up there at nearly 20 percent.

Remember how they kept pounding into us, back in college, that *S=I*? Savings equals Investment. If we have a savings rate of only 1 percent, how are we going to invest?

Of course, in the advanced courses, one finds out that *S* need not equal *I* or maybe even shouldn't. Keynes, for example, disliked people who "saved." Of course he would. He and all his Bloomsbury friends used to laugh at the Victorians, bluestockings who thought they should scrimp. In Robert Skidelsky's biography of the economist, Keynes seems, at times, almost to blame them for England's slump.

Besides, it's chilling to think what might have happened in the U.S. since 1979 if people *had* actually saved. Wages were dropping. We had less to spend. We used credit cards like never before just to keep up. If we had saved, demand would have dropped even more.

I like to think about the equation *S=I*. What *I* did I stop by not putting in more *S*? When I drive west of Chicago, I can picture the buildings that didn't get built because I threw it all away on bad dates. But what if I'd saved it? It would have gone into Wal-Marts, Waldenbooks, squalid little glass things. I'm glad when I drive out here. Because I chose not to save, the banking system couldn't lend out my money. Good. Let them get it from Japan.

The question of how much less we're saving remains a murky one. To begin with, many economists define savings differently, with some, for example, including our houses as part of our savings and some not. And there are so many conflicting studies that as a pension expert I know says, "Only a non-economist can understand it."

I will summarize what I think we do know:

(1) The way most of our money is saved is through pensions.

(2) It was once thought that pension funds would be the overwhelming source of our corporate equity. In a 1976 book called *The Unseen Revolution: How Pension Fund Socialism Came to America*, economist Peter Drucker crowed that pension funds would soon own most of U.S. business. Without even knowing it, the "workers" would own 60 percent of equity by 1985. By Drucker's estimate, the plans already owned a quarter. What actually happened? By the 1990s, the plans, public and private, still owned only about a quarter. The Unseen Revolution turned out to be a dud.

(3) Some traditional pensions are worth less and are more volatile. If this is how most Americans save, then most Americans aren't saving. The trusty old traditional plans by which we once saved have declined, and our pension savings now seem less stable. We save through 401(k)s. We invest in mutual funds. We look for the quick buck. I hear my friends say, "I know I should invest for the long term. But what can I do?" My friend Jim says, "I know, I know, but that's my retirement money. What am I going to live on if that 401(k) doesn't shoot up and up?"

Wasn't it people like you and me who were calling for companies to downsize, to lay off, well, people like us, the middle managers, the professionals? In the last recession, weren't we who had our money in mutual

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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

What Are They Selling?

When Education Alternatives, Inc. (EAI)—the private for-profit company that says it can do a better job of running public schools than the current management *and* make money on the deal—began to market this claim five years ago, there was no way to evaluate it. The company itself was an unknown start-up and there weren't any others doing what it proposed to do.

The promises sounded good: EAI could do more for less. They had an educational program that would raise student achievement levels "beginning immediately." They would be more businesslike about money, so schools could get higher-quality results for what they were already spending, and could even save money through more efficient management. The company now has a track record. Have any of its promises been fulfilled?

EAI will manage your schools, but don't expect the kids to learn.

In Miami, where EAI has been providing services at one public elementary school, the school board has decided not to renew the contract. In the four years that South Pointe Elementary School students were taught by teachers hand-picked and trained by EAI to use its computer-oriented instructional program, "the Tesseract Way," they did no better than comparable kids in other Miami schools. The test scores looked typical—even though EAI and the school district each had poured in extra resources and effort to make South Pointe an academic showcase.

In Baltimore, where EAI is running nine public schools, the company's performance has become a can of worms for Mayor Kurt Schmoke. Instead of doing more for less, a June 5-7 special report in *The Baltimore Sun* reveals, in the first three years of its five-year contract the company got $18 million more to manage its nine schools than the district would otherwise have spent. But the "measurable" student gains EAI promised didn't materialize despite the additional resources: Test scores at the EAI schools have dropped, while scores for kids in all other city schools have steadily risen.

Not that EAI didn't try to get its scores to rise. Early on, the company issued a press release announcing astonishing test score gains at its schools. Shortly thereafter, it also issued stock. After a newspaper investigation, however, EAI acknowledged that the claims were wildly off but chalked them up to a clerical error. The same kind of thing happened again last year—higher scores followed by a retraction. Uneasy city leaders are now demanding to see financial records that EAI claims are private. And the mayor has warned that if new test scores and an outside evaluation by University of Maryland researchers turn out to be negative, he may pull the plug on EAI.

In Hartford, where city officials last fall awarded EAI a contract to manage all 32 of their public schools, the deal was that the company would get to keep half of any money it could "save"—which means cut—out of the district's budget. EAI does not earn anything on the basis of how well Hartford's children learn. So it should be no surprise to anyone that the company's first budget plan called for enormous cuts in expenditures, to be achieved mainly by eliminating 300 of the district's approximately 1,800 teaching positions. That's the last thing poor children need.

And it turns out that while EAI officials were figuring out how to cut the district's budget to the bone, they were also running up more than a million dollars in expenses charged to Hartford taxpayers—including first-class travel, expensive meals, luxury accommodations, and public relations activities. Every time the press called for comment or information about its program, for example, EAI turned on the publicity meter and billed the schools for the tab.

These and other shocking revelations prompted a city-wide wave of outrage and embarrassment that forced even the EAI majority on the school board to back away from the firm's harsh budget. But EAI officials have emerged from the turmoil with a new deal: They will assume responsibility for managing just five schools next year, even though last year they rode into Hartford proclaiming that they had the expertise to run the whole system. They have demonstrated only that they know how to live high off the hog while taking a meat axe to a struggling urban education system.

EAI continues to go around the country hawking the idea that its business skill and education knowledge will put schools on a fast track to improved student achievement and better management of limited resources. The reality is, the company hasn't produced. Instead of doing more for less, they've done less for more. Does that stop them from selling their shoddy product? No. But they've adapted their pitch to current circumstances. EAI's new line on test scores, according to a June 14 article in *The Washington Post*, is that "they are not the only, or even the best, measure of the progress students are making."

In other words, EAI will manage your schools, but don't expect the kids to learn to read, write, and count.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1995 by Albert Shanker.

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funds shouting loudest for our own liquidation? Fire me, please—just jack up my 401(k). When we have downsized one another, who will be saving then? I guess if it comes to that, Mexico can always bail us out. They owe us one, don't they?

I can't prove all this volatility is destabilizing the U.S., but I do know this: it's de-stabilizing me.

III.

It might seem odd to say that the U.S. pension system has collapsed. From a distance, it looks as though more people have pensions than ever. And not just pensions, but IRAs, 401(k)s, profit-sharing plans and all the "salesmen" that go with them. As a pension lawyer, though, I can tell you the whole thing is an illusion, a *trompe l'oeil.*

I'd like to talk about the different plans. I always feel as if I'm showing people their caskets, so just relax and breathe slowly, and let's open them up one by one.

(1) *Defined benefit.* This is what many of our parents had. It meant that you knew you'd get a certain fixed amount each month after retirement, and you knew what that amount would be. These defined benefit plans started out as union plans. Then non-union companies began offering them. Who needed unions? It began to seem that we were saving on our own and didn't need help. Then, as unions weakened, the trusty pension plans declined. About half of the private work force were once in defined benefit plans. Now that half has dropped to a third. Besides, a recent study by the Committee on Economic Development shows that between 1981 and 1991, the employer contribution per person into defined benefit plans dropped by roughly half. Now, some economists say, "No problem. The stock market went up, so business didn't have to contribute." But labor unions and pension rights groups scoff. They say the downscaling of employer contributions amounted to an invisible pay cut or, at least, a freeze in benefits.

Why did the old-style defined benefit plans work well? Oddly enough, because they were unfunded. A union such as the United Auto Workers would force General Motors to promise to contribute a fixed amount to the pension. GM would have to figure out how to fund it.

"Isn't that bad?" I used to ask my union clients.

"No," they'd say. "It's good. We set it up high, real high. They've got thirty years to scramble, to come up with the money."

Now that employers aren't under the same union pressures to set up these plans, they're flooding people out into...

(2) *401(k)s.* These are pension plans for employers who don't want to pay pensions. They are a type of defined contribution plan, but unlike the old defined contribution schemes, they're voluntary. We K-Mart workers kick in what our Mastercard and our consciences allow. The employer then, sometimes, "matches" this amount. 401(k)s are great for dentists, drug dealers, people with big dreams of Boca Raton. But they're a joke for people who earn $10 an hour and can barely make it from week to week. As for the median worker, racking up $26,000 a year, even if he's Silas Marner, there's just no margin to save.

The new 401(k)s are different from the traditional defined benefit plans. In profit-sharing and other plans, saving was mandatory. But with the 401(k), it's do it yourself, as your median wage falls.

(3) *IRAs.* Who needs an "employer"? The temporary, part-time worker—one in four workers—has no real employer anyway, not even the kind that can match a 401(k).

Every month in Washington, someone like Newt Gingrich says, "Oh, we're going to expand 401(k)s, and IRAs, bring in more people, etc." What are these people supposed to contribute? Real money? We don't have any.

As it is, about 70 percent of the work force now qualifies for tax-deductible IRAs. Anyone can set up an IRA, but not everyone qualifies for the deductible kind. Each year Congress showers people like you and me with more tax credits, more tax deductions, free toasters. We go into the red to save. But, of this 70 percent who can take out deductible IRAs, only about 5 percent actually do so. They've all got free toasters by now. The rest of us have no unions and almost no way to raise our benefits except through individual begging. Even where unions do exist, they can't budge pension benefits any more than they can budge wages.

The average American worker now holds an average of seven jobs—consecutively, that is, though pretty soon it may be all at one time. With all these people floating around, there is a risk that many will not vest and, in the end, will get nothing. Zero. Nada. Not one cent. More troubling, a vast number of them will get only a deferred vested benefit, based on five or ten years of work. That's worth about $2,000 or $3,000 total. It's a consolation prize for getting in five to six years working for the same employer—now much more typical—instead of thirty. Who gets in thirty these days? Americans move from job to job, like Okies in jalopies, even if they have B.A.s. Not one of these people is going to have a pension. And they're the lucky ones. At least half the male work force and more than half the female work force are not at this moment in any kind of retirement plan at all. They can't even dream of getting nothing.

Then there's Social Security. According to a *Wall Street Journal*/NBC poll in March, most people assume they will get whacked. Indeed, 29 percent of those surveyed predicted there would be no Social Security when they retire. Another 37 percent thought it would be slashed severely. Most of the rest said they didn't know.

Everyone in this country is headed for an unmarked grave. Even you and I, and all our friends out

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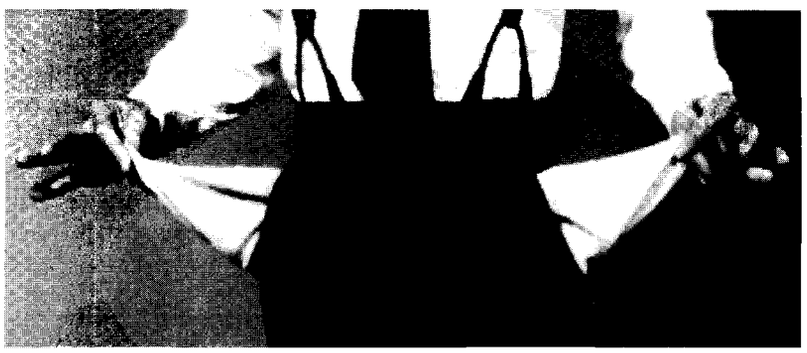
in Seattle who ride their bikes—one day they're going to throw all of us, you, me, the lawyers in Seattle, in the same unmarked grave and the bicycles on top of us. And on top of it, they'll put a simple wooden cross, like Dylan Thomas's.

IV.

I'm one of the 5 percent who actually took out an IRA. But it was just once, in 1987, and now I almost wish I hadn't. Each January, there's a sickening moment when it comes. I know how little is in it. Damn it, if I'd never opened one, there wouldn't be this agony. Maybe I should move.

Each year I throw the statement, unopened, on the dining room table. Sometime in June, I put it in a drawer. I'm helping others who have no pensions, but I'm like a doctor in a plague who won't take his own temperature. Of course, when I get the IRA statement, I get, as I do every May day, a credit card application, "pre-approved." How can something be "pre-approved"? I'd like to keep about thirty or forty of them. Can I open them when I'm 82?



Sometimes I keep a "spending diary," but it always turns dark, and I begin recording conversations, which is not the point. The other night I dined at a restaurant with a young German woman, and I thought, "When the bill comes, impress her, pay for it in cash." But, as always when the bill comes, I panic, and pull out a Visa, which I see her staring at.

"It's odd," she says, "how people in America use credit cards for everything."

"Look," I say, annoyed, "they use credit cards in Europe, too."

"For *groceries*?"

At least I don't do that.

It's not that, being an American, I'm just reckless. But I live in a market so big, on such a fruited plain, that it's hard to confine my wants, as maybe a European can manage to do more easily. There are so many *things* here. That's why it's so explosive when wages fall.

I know I should save. I know what William Bennett, with his *Book of Virtues*, would say. Why can't we save, be provident and upstanding, like Americans in the 1950s?

But a lot of those people were in unions. It's not John Calvin but John L. Lewis who made them save. Whether they knew it or not (and many of them didn't), the unions, with the pension funds, were pulling the money out of their pockets. We had a system back in the 1950s of forced savings. Besides, who can save now, when the Affluent Society is going in reverse, and diabolically so, giving us more and more "wants" and less and less cash?

And then, when I look at my German friend, I realize she's going back to Europe. She'll never have to worry.

The other day, I spoke with an official from Germany, and he mentioned casually the public pension, or the German Social Security. "Over here, in the U.S.," he reminded me, "Social Security is a 'replacement' income of 40 percent."

And in Germany what do they get? From 60 to 65 percent, of a much, much higher wage. It gets better. In Italy, it's 80 percent; in the Netherlands, 70 percent.

Imagine: 65 percent for life. As in $26 per hour *x* 65 percent *x* mortality factor, etc.

Yes, German retirees get this much or even more, in fact, though some studies try to low-ball it.

And when does this start?

I didn't believe this.

"Oh," he said, "Germans typically stop working by 58."

"You mean," I gasped, "they leave by 58 and never work again?"

"Yes."

"But what do people do the rest of their lives?"

"They have hobbies."

Hobbies? I didn't want my voice to rise. "I mean, they're 58, don't they want to do a little work?"

He seemed puzzled, so I added, "I mean isn't there a lot of *restlessness*?"

He paused. "No."

Meanwhile, we're at a miserable two-fifths. Japan and France have much higher public pensions. France actually has two mandated pensions. Yet most economists, even liberals, believe if we don't take our pitiful two-fifths, and *slash* it, the U.S. is going to collapse.

Of course they will never cut public pensions in France or Germany. It's hard for us to imagine, when we read about the French grape growers going on strike, or truckers burning tires, or rock throwing at Air France. We love to talk about our "angry white males"; but, while they may be angry, these guys seem pretty meek when it comes to their own wages.

In Germany, this spring, I.G. Metall, which employs more than 3 million workers, went on strike. The workers got a pay raise of 4 percent. When was the last time anyone in the U.S. got an across-the-board pay raise of 4 percent? Pay raises like that send the Germans to Las Vegas and let them stay in Caesar's Palace. Our old people are working at Montgomery Ward.

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"It's shocking to a European," a German friend said, "to come over here and see old people working at the counters."

And what do we call these old people, hands palsied, trembling, serving up fries and shakes? "Greedy Geezers of America, Amalgamated," is what Senator Alan Simpson, who now heads the Senate Committee on Social Security, calls them. It's not just Simpson. Even my friends, civic liberals, mutter about AARP as a "special interest group."

A special interest group? To me, it's the closest thing the U.S. has to a big European-type union, an I.G. Metall for old people. At 46, I almost feel like a 16-year-old who wants to join the Army, only they won't take me because of my age. When will I be old enough?

Senator Simpson, William Safire, the Cato Institute—they're all pushing the idea that the Greedy Geezers, the two-fifths club, are preying on the young. Safire writes column after column about how the old are destroying the Republic. The only hope, for the Cato Institute, is "privatizing" Social Security.

Let's see if I have this straight. Most of my friends can expect to pay $350,000 to $500,000 to educate a kid in a decent school (not a public one). In a country with a personal savings rate of about 4 percent? It's laughable. Where are we going to get the money?

The Clintonites have come up with the answer. You know that pension money? You didn't really think it was going for your pension? Now in the 1995 budget, Clinton (and the House is even more eager) will let us dip, without penalty, even deeper into the IRAs, so we can pull out the money to send the kids to college.

And after we've blown all our savings, all our pension money, on them, is it too much to expect that maybe they could kick in a little to our Social Security? According to the Cato Institute, and Safire, and Simpson, yes.

First, what kind of country is it that lets people dip into their *pension* money for their kids' education? Here are the Americans my age, the baby-boomers, who have a "savings problem," the way the people in the old John Cheever stories have a "drinking problem," and they're going to give us keys to the liquor cabinet. Second, what are we going to live on?

"You're preying on them," the Cato Institute is shrieking, and it advocates "privatizing" the whole system. Now what does this mean, "privatization"? It means the kids will set up their own "private" Social Security accounts, like IRAs. Then they'll turn those accounts over to money managers, that is, to other kids, 27, 28, who work out of Singapore and who are free to take all the money and put it on red. If the Cato Institute has its way, how long before the kids, drooling, want to tap into their own "private" Social Security, the way we (for their sake) tapped into the IRAs? Who's going to say no? Clinton? Dole? Pete Wilson?

So we, the baby-boomers, will get the last laugh.

"This will be the greatest intergenerational war of our lifetime," says Simpson, 64, who seems to think he's going to be leading the other side. So do Paul Tsongas, Warren Rudman, Safire and the rest as they head into a Mao-like golden age.

I don't think there will be "war." But who can blame the kids for going after us? Aren't we doing the same to our parents now? How many now are trying to strip Old Dad and Mom of their assets to qualify them for "Medicaid"? What's creepy to me is that our own children are watching, as we strip the bodies, take off the precious rings and push them into "homes." As our own savings fall, we have to protect ourselves, right?

Keynes, who had a lot of money, once observed: if we really want to corrupt the national character, "cut the cord between effort and reward." He was writing about the demoralizing effect of unemployment more than fifty years ago. In some ways, though, the phrase applies even better to working-class Americans—employed Americans—now. The cord is being cut, maybe not as dramatically as for the jobless, but for many more people than were ever affected then. Because people work forty-five, fifty, fifty-five hours a week and get less and less. For all that "effort," don't we deserve some "reward"? So we run up our Visa. We shove our parents into nursing homes. We try desperately to cut our taxes. We shriek about affirmative action. We prey on each other. "Where's mine?" Isn't this the effect of the cord being cut?

On public radio, I heard an economist saying, "Oh, the young people coming out of college, they're different now. They *know* they'll have to work longer for less. They're prepared to save." Are they? That's what they may say now, to please Old Mom and Dad, who never could save. But how will they feel about us, twenty years from now, when they have kids of their own, and the fall their kids face will be even steeper? Aren't you and I, crow's feet, wrinkles, hands and face aging in the mirror, about to step into the role of enemy of the people?

When I was young, I thought, "See Paris and die." But I don't want to die in Paris in a rented room, like Old Goriot. The irony, of course, is that if I'd gone to Paris when I was young and lived for the moment, on the Left Bank, I'd have a pension now and wouldn't have to worry. But that was a risk I took when I stayed in the United States.

Now what? It would be nice to think, in twenty years, when they come for my Social Security card, that I will still have my twenty Visa cards, which is to say, my life's savings. Run down the road, run them all up. A kind of revenge. My brother says, "It takes them about a year to catch you." Then, so what? Can't you file for bankruptcy? When you die, you'll have discharged every debt, my fellow lawyers tell me, as a matter of law—except, it seems, the kids' college loans. But when the Just Judge comes at the end of time, maybe He'll discharge those, too. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Cry Havoc

Murder inspires. The list is long of films, plays, novels, ballets begotten by real-life killings. Two of the more fertile murders, in that sense, occurred in 1933 in Le Mans, a French town otherwise noted only for auto racing. Two young sisters who worked as maids for a well-to-do Le Mans family murdered their mistress and her daughter—butchered them, in fact. Stimulated imaginatively by the story, Jean Genet wrote *The Maids* in 1946, a jewel in the crown of that fantastic genius; in 1964 Nico Papatakis, a French filmmaker, produced *Les Abysses* from the same material; and a few years ago the American playwright Wendy Kesselman used the material for her play *My Sister in This House.* Nancy Meckler, an American resident in Britain, directed the play in London; and now, with Kesselman's screenplay, Meckler has directed the film—called **Sister My Sister** (Seventh Art).

Every aspect of the filmmaking itself is superb. Ashley Rowe, the cinematographer, has found exactly the right balance of light and shadow, the right temper of color, to make every shot look both natural and careful, the everyday put before us as evidence of strangeness. Even in those scenes where little happens, our eyes can discern some sort of imminence.

As for the directing, no one on earth could tell that this is a first film. Meckler has been directing in the British theater for twenty years (including a production of *Macbeth* with Julie Walters, who is in this film) and has run her own company, the Shared Experience Theater. In her film debut, she seizes us at once. Before the credits we see, over music and without voices, a sequence of the two sisters as children, happy together, the older one caring for the younger—shot in gray and white like a faded photograph. After the credits, color manifests the passage of time, as the camera moves slowly down the staircase in a prosperous house. We see no one. We see great blood smears on floor and walls. Then, following this Before and After prelude, the film begins.

Throughout the picture, Meckler directs with jeweler's precision, reflecting her work with actors in the theater, yet her film never becomes cinematically static. Neither does she fall into the debutante's error of pouring on cinematic tricks just to prove that a theater director knows all about film. (A fault that snagged even the early Bergman.) What we are conscious of constantly, in a gripping rather than a constricting way, is design. Everything that Meckler chooses to show us, every move of her characters, every elision, every variation of pace is part of that hard, quiet, compelling design, moving toward murder.

Good small touches aid this design. When the two sisters go to a photographer for a picture, we never see him. We only see them posing, while his mellifluous voice keeps trying to winkle information out of them about their employer. The fact that we never see the man even though they are in his studio underscores their isolation. When a faucet drips in the kitchen where the sisters work, we may tense a bit at the cliché, but Meckler amplifies it into a motif.

Joely Richardson plays Christine, the older sister. Unlike her own older sister, Natasha, Joely looks more like her father, Tony Richardson, than her mother, Vanessa Redgrave; but, like Natasha, Joely has inherited an electric talent from her mother. Redgrave, in her autobiography, says of one of Joely's theater performances that it had "fresh spontaneity," "gaiety and gentle gravity." (And why shouldn't a mother review her daughter?) Redgrave would have to alter her terms of admiration here. In this film Richardson is a coiled spring, first sexually, then homicidally.

At the start, when her younger sister Lea joins Christine for service in this house, there is the joy of reunion. Christine's only anxiety is for Lea to learn and succeed in her work. Then, as their employer Madame Danzard becomes more peremptory, as the girls' loneliness and proximity to each other begin to work on them, as sisterly love becomes incestuous, Richardson dramatizes the changes in Christine. Not with crassness but with restraint, a restraint that finally fails, Richardson's

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face and voice tell us of fires and fears and a sexual storm about to break. When the sisters' security is threatened, hot incestuous passion bursts into maniacal frenzy.

As Lea, Jodhi May is the perfect partner. Where Richardson is incisive, May is tremulous, supine, abject. Lea spends most of her waking life in some kind of terror, and (as the prologue predicted), she depends on her sister for protection and control. Latterly, she also depends on Christine for sex. When Christine goes amuck, Lea is of course transmuted with her. May is so desperately subservient to Richardson that we understand why, as the closing titles tell us, Lea was sentenced to only twenty years while Christine was sentenced to the guillotine. (After her prison term Lea worked as a hotel chambermaid until her death in 1982. Christine's death sentence was commuted; she died four years later in an asylum, a mental and physical wreck.)

Julie Walters very neatly draws the character of Madame Danzard, without caricature but with a dignity based on bank accounts. Sophie Thursfield, too, avoids caricature as her lumpy, bored and boring daughter for whom marriage is a continually receding goal.

However, there is a trouble with the film—Kesselman's screenplay. It's skillfully constructed and written, but it's sheer pathology, nothing else. The film is thus only a case history, not a drama, with nothing ultimately to offer other than a chronicle of breakdown, the fracturing of two minds under psychosexual pressures. As with Papatakis's film of some thirty years ago, Kesselman's script suffers from the existence of Genet's play (which itself was sinuously filmed in 1974).

Genet soared far beyond the data of the story. He used the facts as a launchpad into a metaphysical agon, entailing aspects of reality and identity and morality. Kesselman's version is a reductive jolt, back to the data. Still, even if it had no work of genius to compete with, the screenplay of *Sister My Sister* would seem insufficient. A chronicle of disintegration is a long way from a drama of disintegration—such as, for instance, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. (I mention Williams's play, not to swat Kesselman with another work of genius, simply to illustrate the point.)

But whatever could be done with Kesselman's screenplay, Meckler and Richardson and May and all their colleagues have achieved it, with dedication and with art.

Batman Forever (Warner Bros.) almost lives up to its title. I thought it would never end. •

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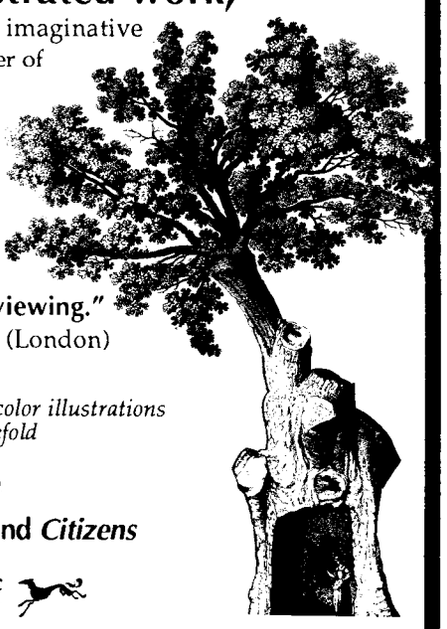

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Robert Brustein on Theater

Popular Elitism

When I first saw Tom Stoppard's **Arcadia** in London last January, I was persuaded not to review it. I had gone in the company of a good friend who loved the play, a brilliant theoretician and Oxford don. Sensing my reservations, he urged that I not write anything until I'd boned up more on Newton's Second Law of Thermodynamics, Fermat's last theorem, Lord Byron's biography, and the evolution in English gardening (initiated by the eighteenth-century landscape architect Lancelot "Capability" Brown) from formal walkways to picturesque irregular ruins. I thought at the time that any cruise ship freighted with so much erudite cargo was not going to float very well or accommodate any passengers without advanced degrees, but it was possible that my sour response was owed to ignorance.

Now that I have completed a refresher course in physics and mathematics, literature and horticulture, and after visiting the Lincoln Center production and reading the play twice, I'm a little bit smarter but still unrepentant about my dissenting view. *Arcadia* is a highly literate, ingenious and intelligent theatrical entertainment, probably Stoppard's most accomplished play. But while one must respect the playwright's wit and erudition, it strikes me as the work of a brilliant impersonator rather than a dramatist with his own authentic voice. The play smells more of the lamp than of the musk of human experience.

Stoppard's prodigious intellect may explain why he has become the chosen author of very clever people and the only contemporary dramatist to be endorsed by *The New York Review of Books*. His research is impeccable and his writing is elegant. He brings real intelligence to an art form that appears to have lost its minds. Indeed, he may very well restore modern drama to the mainstream of modern thought. But just as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* was a precious variation on *Waiting for Godot*, just as *Jumpers* was a lightweight trapeze for the logical positivism of A.J. Ayer and *Travesties* played verbal hopscotch with the writings of Joyce and Trotsky, so *Arcadia* is a virtual grab bag of literary and scientific ideas. I hesitate to employ an epithet that is currently being used to discredit so much important art and thought, but the play seems to me a popularized expression of elitism. *Arcadia* synthesizes abstruse material not in order to advance thought or illuminate minds so much as to intimidate the ignorant. Like *Hapgood*, it is a mental exercise with no discernible purpose other than to demonstrate the author's considerable virtuosity and flatter the intelligence of the educated liberal classes.

Philosophically, *Arcadia* is an effort to dramatize those tensions between science and humanism first explored in C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*. Stylistically, it is an attempt to write a literary wit comedy (sometimes a sex farce) in the tradition of Congreve, Richardson, Wilde and, especially, Shaw. This is a respectable enough ambition. These are the writers who constitute the central English dramatic tradition after Shakespeare. (Paradoxically, all of them are Irish.) Stoppard fits himself neatly into the tradition. Indeed, perhaps the greatest achievement of the Czechoslovakian-born Tomas Strausler is how, even more impressively than the Polish-born Joseph Conrad, he has managed to master the language of his adopted country.

Unlike Conrad, however, Stoppard still hasn't found his own style or purpose, which may explain why so much of his material seems researched rather than invented. In *The New York Review*, Anne Barton identifies similarities between the characters in *Arcadia* and those in Thomas Love Peacock's novel *Headlong Hall*. They also bear resemblances to a number of figures in the dram lit syllabus. Lady Croom, for example, the tart-tongued dowager of Sidley Park ("surely a hermit who takes a newspaper is not a hermit in whom one can have complete confidence") often sounds like Lady Bracknell chastising Ernest for being an orphan. Thomasina, the preternaturally bright student of the tutor Septimus Hodge, reminds us, when she is not piping like Wilde's Cicely Cardew, of those precocious brats in Shavian comedy. The poetaster Ezra Chater, whose wife is "in a state of tropical humidity as would grow orchids in her drawers in January," is a scion of the dim-witted comic cuckolds of Restoration drama. As for Stoppard's diction, it alternates between Wildean epigrams and Shavian paradoxes in an impressive display of sparkling, if extinguishable, fireworks. Even Stoppard's elaborate stage directions, which identify the very books on the schoolroom table, are redolent of Shaw's passion (in plays such as *Man and Superman*) for documenting the contents of libraries. *Arcadia*, which lost out to *Love! Valour! Compassion!* in the Tony Awards, is clearly the superior work, but it should have been nominated for Best Original Play of 1904.

Structurally, *Arcadia* features two separate but parallel historical epochs, which merge in the final scene. In the first, set in 1809, we follow the fortunes of Septimus Hodge, mathematician and literary critic, as he tutors, flatters and makes love to the various inhabitants of the Croom's ancestral home in Derbyshire. In the second, we are back in modern times, witnessing a logomachia between two academic scavengers—Hannah Jarvis, biographer of Caroline Lamb (Byron's mistress), and Bernard Nightingale, her academic critic and scholarly rival—as they compete to reconstruct the events that we, the audience, have already witnessed.

Nightingale, whose scholarly insularity is exceeded only by his academic arrogance (the model for this character may be C.P. Snow's archenemy, the literary critic F.R. Leavis), concludes on the basis of minimal evidence that the person who seduced Mrs. Chater and fought a duel with her husband was Lord Byron, thus accounting for the poet's precipitous departure for the Continent. Being privy to the enacted events, the audience knows that the real seducer was actually Septimus, who ended his life as the Sidley Hermit, living in architect Richard Noakes's overgrown hermitage after Thomasina's premature death in a fire.

That Bernard Nightingale emerges as the comic butt of *Arcadia* seems rather ungrateful of Stoppard, since such academic detectives, being most likely to appreciate the arcane puzzles of his play, will undoubtedly be writing monographs about it for years to come. Bernard typically loves personalities ("who wrote what when") at the expense of facts, and, like Leavis the D.H. Lawrence scholar, he is the only one in the modern section of this putative sex farce who seems to have any genuine interest in sexual behavior. Hannah shrewdly catalogs Bernard's erotic obsessiveness ("Einstein—relativity and sex. Chippendale—sex and furniture. Galileo—'Did the earth move?'"), but like most of the characters in *Arcadia*, even the amorous ones, she seems rather juiceless herself. Thomasina's reading of Newton's discovery that

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heat can't work backward is a forecast of entropy—the gradual cooling of the earth. But this cooling has already taken place among people who have neither the passion nor instinct to lift the play into poetry.

Ultimately, *Arcadia* may be more successful as literature than as drama. It is certainly more enjoyably experienced in the study. I didn't much like either of Trevor Nunn's overactive productions, though (apart from Dearbhla Molloy's forceful Hannah in London) the New York version has the more convincing performances. Victor Garber makes a deliciously pompous Bernard, Billy Crudup is nicely barbed as Septimus, Robert Sean Leonard is attractive as Valentine and Lisa Banes imperious as Lady Croom. The young Paul Giamatti manages to make his Ezra Chater into a middle-aged fuddy-duddy, Jennifer Dundas has pipsqueak charm as Thomasina, and Blair Brown has a laconic edge as Hannah. Mark Thompson's circular set and period costumes, not to mention his Adam-and-Eve in paradise act curtain (after Poussin), establish the timelessness of the proceedings. But what Nunn fails to excavate from the text or the acting is the reality underneath the witticisms, possibly because Stoppard never bothered to plant it in this Arcadian garden.

Will *Arcadia* last? I'm not so sure. Great plays are meant to be experienced, not simply admired, and this one never aspires to touch any organs other than the brain pan. One of Stoppard's characters speaks in Shavian fashion of "the decline from thinking to feeling," but any playwright, Shaw included, who considers this a decline is doomed to a transitory celebration of surfaces, a dance of showy learning and flashy wit on a highly polished floor.

Ingmar Bergman's production of **The Winter's Tale** recently played at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in repertory with his inspired *Madame de Sade* (which I reviewed during its last American appearance). Possibly reflecting the imbalances of the play, it is not one of Bergman's most brilliant productions, but nothing created by this master is ever less than compelling. Set around the turn of the century in a Swedish country home, *The Winter's Tale* is treated as one of the entertainments (another being a musical concert written by an expatriate Scandinavian composer) performed during the wedding celebration of the daughter of the house. This sets the action in the ballroom of a country estate and features considerable domestic horseplay in the mode of *Smiles of a Summer Night*—servants and masters flirting and cavorting,

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children posing with masks, a capella choruses, grouse shooting—somewhat at the expense of the focus of Shakespeare's text.

Still, there is much that is freshly seen in Bergman's reading. For one thing, Leontes's insane jealousy over Hermione—which has always seemed like a pathological version of Othello's abuse of Desdemona—is now provided with some credible motivation. Hermione's graciousness toward Polixenes stops just short of coquetry, while he, in turn, can't keep his eyes or hands off her. Bergman mirrors the king's internal tumult in nature. An orange glow lights the sky as Leontes expresses his spastic rage toward his wife.

Performed by Bergman's favorite actor, the heavyset Börje Ahlstedt, who played the goatish Claudius in *Hamlet* and a lubricious Peer Gynt, this Leontes roars like a maddened bull, mauling and shaking Camillo in his rage, then goring a court lady in full view of the court. (Ahlstedt's brutish Claudius also preferred to have sexual relations in public.) The rustic scenes between the clowns and Autolycus, padded with considerable comic interpolation, have an appealing Nordic heaviness to them, and Bergman does not underplay the erotic side of the Midsummer rituals. Unlike Stoppard, Bergman recognizes that humans possess animal appetites as well as intellectual curiosity. This knowledge makes for robust comedy, powerful drama and superior art. •

The unscientific origins of our obsession with viruses.

The Plague Year

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

I.

In the spring of 1983, a flock of wild ducks carrying a strain of avian influenza virus settled on a pond in a chicken farm in eastern Pennsylvania. The virus was excreted in the ducks' feces, which meant that it got onto the ground and then onto the boots of a farmer, which is why in turn it soon found its way into the chicken barn. From there the virus spread, carried by truckers who go from farm to farm collecting eggs, selling feed or taking broilers to market. As it spread, it replicated hundreds of millions of times, and as it replicated it underwent a critical mutation that turned it from a relatively benign virus into a killer. By late spring, chickens were collapsing within days of infection. By October, 17 million domestic birds—broilers, layers, turkeys, guinea fowl—from Pennsylvania down through Maryland and Virginia were dead.

The great Pennsylvania chicken epidemic went largely unnoticed at the time. In 1983, people did not draw analogies between the health of domestic fowl and the health of the general public. But today is a different matter. The United States is in the grip of paranoia about viruses and diseases and what happened in Pennsylvania has acquired a certain symbolism. In the past six months alone, there has been a Hollywood film, a made-for-TV-movie, a cover story in *Newsweek* and countless news specials and media reports on the subject of killer viruses. This spring a small outbreak of the African Ebola virus in Zaire drew virtually every major news organization to the hitherto unknown city of Kikwit. Richard Preston's *The Hot Zone*, a terrifying tale of how close America came to a major epidemic of the Ebola virus in 1989, has been on *The New York Times* best-seller list for thirty-seven weeks. And a well-received tome about infectious disease has also arrived from Laurie Garrett, a science reporter for *Newsday*, which is filled with gloomy quotations like this one, from the Nobel Prize-winning biologist Joshua Lederberg: "Are we better off than we were a century ago? In most respects we are worse off. We have been neglectful of the microbes and that is a recurring theme that is coming back to haunt us."

The Hot Zone
by Richard Preston
(Random House, 300 pp., $23)

The Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance
by Laurie Garrett
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 750 pp., $25)

In all of these books, movies and news reports there is a sense of fear: Americans have been well and properly frightened of viruses, after all, since the AIDS epidemic began fifteen years ago. But there is also a sense of helplessness, a feeling of fatedness, as if we are all somehow in the same position today as the chickens of the Northeast were twelve years ago. "The chicken population in Pennsylvania [in 1983] is like the world as it is in this moment," Robert G. Webster, one of the country's leading virologists, recently observed. "What would we have done if this virus had occurred in humans? There are millions of us 'chickens' just waiting to be infected."

What are the sources of this pessimism? A generation ago, American public health officials were talking openly about the impending end of all infectious disease. Antibiotics had been developed. Polio had been conquered; and, in one of history's greatest medical triumphs, smallpox was eradicated. Whatever apocalyptic fantasies existed at the time were, by today's standards, tame. Consider the movies. *Panic in the Streets*, Elia Kazan's Oscar-winning film of 1950, has essentially the same plot as *Outbreak*, this spring's big medical thriller: a deadly infectious disease has entered the United States from abroad and is threatening to sweep across the country. In Kazan's movie, however, the plague is contained by one man, a local public officer. In the new movie, it takes several divisions of the U.S. Army. In *Panic in the Streets*, three people die. In *Outbreak*, hundreds die. Most importantly, perhaps, the virus in *Outbreak* is stopped only when, in a stroke of pure luck, a cure is found; but in Kazan's film a cure for the plague exists all along. In fact, in the older film the prospect of the plague spreading across the country appears to be terrifying not because it threatens the lives of countless Americans, but because it would require a costly and presumably difficult mass-inoculation program. Despite the similarities in their plots, the two films have about as much in common as "Marcus Welby, M.D." has with "E.R."

Some of the blame for this transformation clearly belongs with AIDS, the epidemic that has more or less shattered the public's confidence in the power of science. But AIDS has never been seen as a threat to the entire species. In fact, AIDS is exactly the opposite of the kind of random, uncontrollable epidemic that seems to have now seized the popular imagination. The truth is that it is very hard to find an adequate explanation for

MALCOLM GLADWELL is New York bureau chief of *The Washington Post*.

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the current American obsession. Joshua Lederberg's comment that we are worse off today than a century ago is proof only that he is a better student of microbiology than of history.

How can we be worse off than we were at a time when the average American lived only into his 40s, and the hospitals were filled with concurrent epidemics of tuberculosis, acute rheumatic fever, smallpox, diphtheria, tetanus, polio and pneumonia? Ebola may be new and scary, but in the twenty years since its discovery it has killed no more than several hundred people. In fact, it is safe to say that more Zairians in Kikwit died of diarrhea this spring than of Ebola. Even the analogy to the Pennsylvania chickens, though it fits the current hysteria like a glove, is absurd. Human beings do not live their lives crammed next to each other in metal cages. They do not wallow in their own feces. They have the brains and the ability to take precautions against disease and contagion. People are not chickens. So why all of a sudden are we convinced that we are?

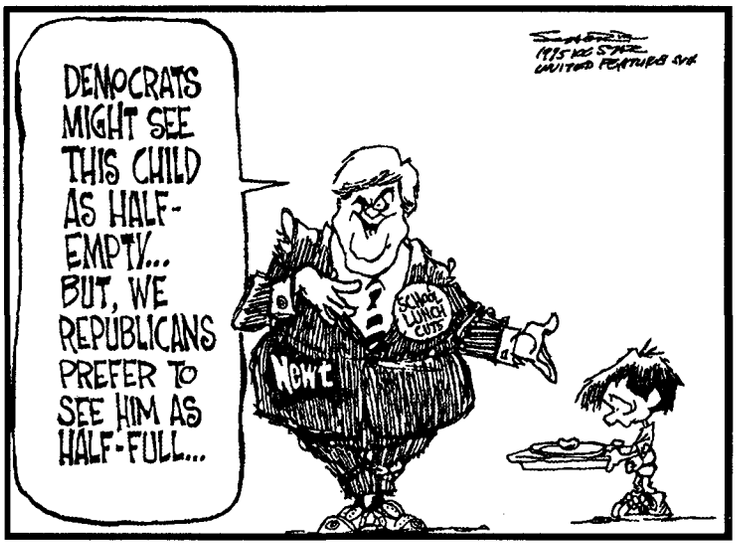
II.

African Ebola is one of the deadliest of known human viruses. It kills by clotting the blood of its victims, shutting off the flow of nutrients to key parts of the body and chewing through connective tissue, so that the infected literally cough their guts out. No one knows what animal serves as Ebola's natural host, but it can jump from species to species, from guinea pigs to humans, killing virtually everything it touches. There is no cure for Ebola. And there is no vaccine. On the three occasions that it has broken out among humans—twice in Zaire and once in the Sudan—it has left behind a trail of death. Only once has Ebola made its way to North America and that occasion is the basis of Richard Preston's *The Hot Zone.*

It is a remarkable book, rivetingly written. When a shorter version of the manuscript appeared in *The New Yorker* several years ago, it provoked a bidding war in Hollywood, and since its publication as a book late last year, it has remained at or near the top of best-seller lists. It is safe to say that it is because of the success of *The Hot Zone* that *Outbreak* was made, that the Ebola outbreak in Zaire was covered as feverishly as it was, that the idea of killer viruses has achieved such sudden prominence. In the epidemic of virus paranoia, *The Hot Zone* is patient zero.

Preston's book centers on a shipment of monkeys brought in 1989 to a quarantine facility in Reston, Virginia. Not long after their arrival, the animals began to get sick. Mucus streamed from their noses. Their lungs became clotted and collapsed. Their intestines turned the consistency of gumbo. As one animal after another died, the keepers of the monkey house were first puzzled, then terrified as they realized that they had on their hands the first North American outbreak of African Ebola virus. To make matters worse, the strain of Ebola in the monkey house appeared to be different than most. African Ebola passes from one victim to another through direct contact with blood or bodily fluids. But Ebola Reston, as it became known, appeared to be airborne, moving from one monkey to another as if it were the flu.

The gravity of this situation cannot be exaggerated. By the time the U.S. Army and the Centers for Disease Control were notified, several workers in the monkey house in Reston had already clearly been exposed to the infected monkeys. They had also gone home to their families and eaten in restaurants and ridden on buses, which meant that the virus, if it was truly was airborne, might have spread throughout the Washington area. Acting under strict secrecy, so as not to cause public alarm, the Army moved in and sealed off the monkey house, incinerating every animal inside. Then they braced for a possible human epidemic. It never came. By some genetic fluke, the



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same mutation that rendered Ebola Reston airborne apparently also left it harmless to humans.

If this plot sounds familiar, it should. It is essentially a beefed-up version of *The Andromeda Strain,* Michael Crichton's 1969 best-seller. (Such is the lingering impact of Crichton's novel, and of fiction upon fact, that in both *The Hot Zone* and *The Coming Plague* scientists are quoted as using the book's title to refer to the hypothetical virus capable of wiping out humanity.) In Crichton's book, the American military sends up a secret satellite that disrupts the delicate ecosystem of a strange and hostile place (outer space) and comes back down with a microbe that kills everyone it touches (the Andromeda Strain). A team of crack scientists put on space suits and seal off the town invaded by Andromeda. The microbe, they soon realize, is airborne and threatens the United States. Just as it is clear that it has escaped, however, the microbe mutates and in its new form ends up harmless to humans.

But the parallels go beyond plot. Both books, Crichton's work of fiction and Preston's work of non-fiction, have the same cinematic breathlessness, the same quick cutting between scenes, the same hushed melodramatic endings to paragraphs, the same heroic depictions of scientists. Crichton gives his chapters titles such as "Contact," "Crisis," "Alert," "Decontamination," "Spread," "Evaluation," "Analysis," "Level 5." Preston gives his chapters titles such as "Diagnosis," "Total Immersion," "Into Level Three," "Exposure," "Chain of Command," "Insertion," "Inside," "Decon." Of course, *The Hot Zone* is a true story and *The Andromeda Strain* is not. But there are conventions of fear in modern American culture, and there is no denying *The Hot Zone* is written, in style and substance, in self-conscious imitation of a sci-fi thriller. This is one of the things that makes the book so exciting. It is also what makes the book occasionally dishonest.

Preston's book begins, for example, in a place called Kitum Cave at the base of Mount Elgon on the Kenyan-Ugandan border, a huge volcanic cavern that for centuries has served as a gathering place for the wildlife of the rainforest. "Kitum Cave is Mount Elgon's equivalent of the Times Square subway station," Preston writes. "It is an underground traffic zone, a biological mixing point where different species of animals and insects cross one another's paths in an enclosed air space." Since two of the known cases of Marburg virus, a close cousin of Ebola, were found in people who had visited Kitum, Preston treats the cave as the birthplace of Ebola. In the book's climactic scene, he actually dons a plastic biohazard suit and visits the cave himself, gingerly making his way along the cavern's walls.

In medieval times, the plague was thought to originate in miasma, or a marshy putrescense, and Kitum Cave is Preston's miasma, a dark hole deep in the rainforest that gives Ebola an appropriately sinister provenance. It is a marvelous image. Just what it has to do with the story, beyond the adding of atmosphere, is a little unclear. Two of the three known outbreaks of Ebola took place hundreds of miles away from Kitum in Zaire, and the third outbreak was centered in the grasslands of southern Sudan, which suggests that there may be no special relationship between Ebola and the rainforest at all.

Preston also follows the conventions of the genre in his over-the-top descriptions of the men who hunt down and probe the mysteries of Ebola. They are blunt, passionate and iconoclastic: loners driven by a fierce desire to know the truth. "C.J. Peters," he writes of one,

> could swim through bureaucracy like a shark. He inspired great loyalty in his staff, and he made enemies easily and deliberately, when it suited him.... He was required by Army regulations to show up for work at eight o'clock in the morning, but he usually drifted in around ten o'clock. He disliked wearing a uniform. Usually he wore faded blue jeans with a flaming Hawaiian shirt....

(The Roy Scheider role.)

On another occasion, our breathless correspondent catches up with the co-discoverer of Ebola, Karl Johnson, "a lean, bearded man, with a soft voice that one had to listen for in the wind" (the Sam Waterston role). He is fly-fishing on the Bighorn River in Montana, where Preston poses the overwhelming question:

> "Are you worried about a species-threatening event?"
>
> He stared at me. "What the hell do you mean by that?"
>
> "I mean a virus that wipes us out."
>
> "Well, I think it could happen. Certainly it hasn't happened yet. I'm not worried. More likely it would be a virus that reduces us by 90 percent."
>
> "Nine out of ten humans killed? And you're not bothered."
>
> A look of mysterious amusement crossed his face. "A virus can be useful to a species by thinning it out," he said.

One wonders, reading this passage, just who is manipulating whom. Is Johnson slyly putting one over on the naïve journalist about just how nonchalantly he views the "thinning" of the species? Or is Preston complicit in all of this, and trying to scare the bejesus out of his readers? Either way, it would have been nice if Preston had shown even a trace of skepticism about the pronouncements of his lean, grizzled hero.

The people who worry about epidemics, after all, are people inclined to think in apocalyptic terms. They spend all their time looking at or thinking about things that kill people and then trying to talk non-medical people into what often seems like an overreaction. The best of them, like those who shut down the San Francisco bath houses in the early 1980s, can accurately see the possibility of disaster with only the scantest of evidence. But it is important to realize that the alarmism that makes them good at their job also makes them rather unreliable on matters such as the future of the human race. I remember once having lunch with a well-known epidemiologist, a man who had cut his teeth investigating outbreaks of food poisoning. We were supposed to be talking about the AIDS epidemic. But in the course of our meal he became increasingly distracted, staring worriedly over my shoulder. Only at the end of our lunch did I figure out why. Behind me was the restaurant's salad bar, and behind that a large picture window. For a full hour he had been fixated on the sun creeping slowly along the restaurant floor, menacingly making its way toward the potato salad.

III.

Still, it would be a mistake to dismiss *The Hot Zone* as frivolous. This is more than merely a thriller. What makes the book so interesting, and helps to account for its extraordinary popularity, is the manner in which Preston manages to turn the story of Ebola into an ecological parable. This is not only a medical warning, it is also an environmental warning. In Preston's hands, epidemiology leads directly to a kind of Luddism. For the new killer viruses of the African rainforest, he believes, represent nature's response to humanity's environmental crimes.

This is an argument that rose to prominence with the emergence of AIDS. HIV, the theory goes, probably lived for millennia in the jungles of Africa, peacefully co-existing with its natural animal host. From time to time, it may have jumped into humans, making a brief run, say, through a jungle village, but it stayed in the rainforest. Then came the massive environmental upheaval of the 1970s. Truck routes were built into the continental interior. The Ugandan-Tanzanian war, which took place at the

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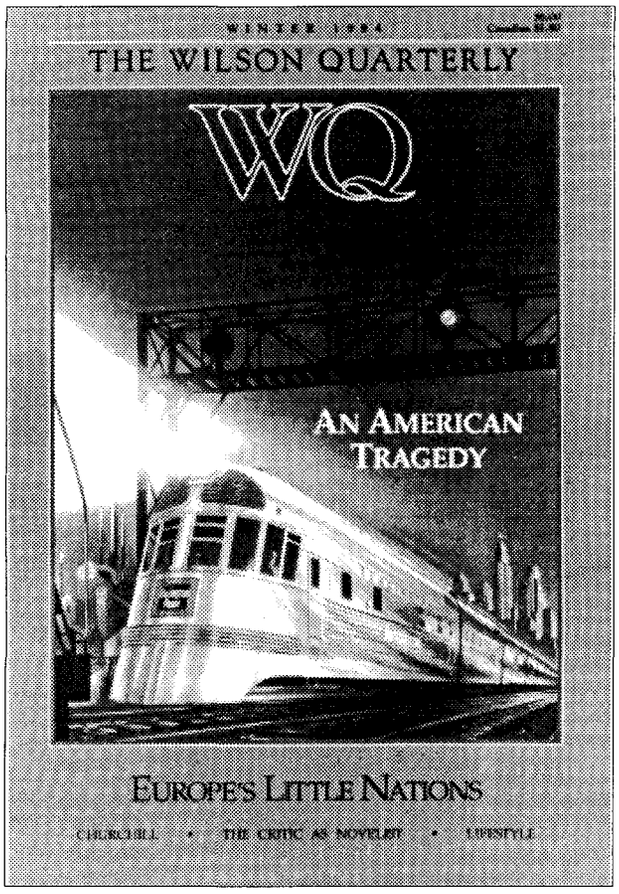

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center of where monkey-borne HIV is thought to reside, uprooted entire populations. Cities began to spill over into what had been virgin territory, bringing with them new patterns of sexual behavior and prostitution. The effect was to give HIV a clear route out of the jungle. And what happened with AIDS, Preston says, is what is now happening with Ebola, and may soon happen again with something infinitely nastier than either of them.

Laurie Garrett takes this argument one step further. In *The Coming Plague*, her 750-page opus, she is not concerned just with rainforest viruses. She maintains that toxic shock syndrome, Legionnaires' disease, the rise of antibiotic-resistant infections, Lassa fever, Hantaan virus and virtually every other microbial outbreak of the past twenty years are all linked by the same pattern of environmental irresponsibility. "Ultimately humanity will have to change its perspective on its place in Earth's ecology if the species hopes to stave off or survive the next plague," she concludes. In the world of microbes,

> human beings stomp about with swagger, elbowing their way without concern into one ecosphere after another. The human race seems equally complacent about blazing a path into a rainforest with bulldozers and arson or using an antibiotic "scorched earth" policy to chase unwanted microbes across the duodenum.

This idea clearly has its roots in the environmentalism of the 1980s. Then we were told that destroying the rainforest would irreparably alter our climate. Now we are told that it will destroy our health. This revision, however, is not trivial. If the environmentalist warnings failed to ignite mass fear or mass politics, it was because they were so abstract. For how long could a series of speculative scientific projections about long-term trends toward warmer weather (of all the terrifying fates!) hold the public's attention? But the new virus paranoia puts the old global warming paranoia to shame. This is not a prediction. It is a judgment. We have wronged nature and it will exact its revenge.

Just listen to the wrathful Preston, in the final chapter of his book:

> The emergence of AIDS, Ebola and any number of other rainforest agents appears to be a natural consequence of the ruin of the tropical biosphere. The emerging viruses are surfacing from ecologically damaged parts of the earth.... In a sense, the earth is mounting an immune response against the human species. It is beginning to react to the human parasite, the flooding infection of people, the dead spots of concrete all over the planet, the cancerous rot-outs in Europe, Japan and the United States, thick with replicating primates, the colonies enlarging and spreading and threatening to shock the biosphere with mass extinctions. Nature has interesting ways of balancing itself. The rainforest has its own defenses. The earth's immune system, so to speak, has recognized the presence of the human species and is starting to kick back in. The earth is attempting to rid itself of an infection by the human parasite. Perhaps AIDS is the first step in a natural process of clearance.

There is a very peculiar collection of ideas here. The ideology expressed is not at all like the one in *The Hot Zone*'s fictional predecessors from the cold war. They shared Preston's preoccupation with mankind's extinction, but without this self-loathing. Crichton's book delivered only a straightforward warning that America has enemies even in the farthest of places (outer space) and the smallest of sizes (submicroscopic). And in *Panic in the Streets* the plague is carried into the United States by an illegal alien. The evil isn't American, it's someone else's.

But Preston's notion of plague isn't really biblical either. True, it has a hoary punitive dimension: the idea of disease as a punishment for wickedness. And so does *Outbreak*, in which the killer virus comes into this country as a result of a Pentagon biological warfare experiment gone awry. "This is what happens when men go chopping down trees where no man should be," an ancient African medicine man says as he surveys the ruins of a village destroyed by the virus at the beginning of the movie. "The Gods got angry. This is a punishment." In the Bible, however, natural apocalypse is banished, in a climactic moment in Genesis, from the scheme of reward and punishment. God promised Noah after the great flood that he will never again "destroy every living creature," and created the rainbow to attest to the promise. And so plague was *not* apocalypse. Plagues in medieval times were "visitations." The choice of words was deliberate: they came and they left. And AIDS is "the gay plague" to the Christian right precisely because it seems so selective: it singles out those guilty of the sins of homosexual promiscuity and drug use.

Today's imagined plague is something entirely new. We are in the grip of a terrifying super-virus of our own creation, a mutant hybrid of cold war apocalyptics, biblical moralism and environmental fire and brimstone. Is it any wonder that grown men are running around comparing mankind to chickens?

IV.

What should we make of all this? Is nature really about to teach humanity a lesson? The answer depends in large part on whether you are an optimist or a pessimist, and on the magnitude of your faith in the power of medical science to respond quickly to new problems. But it should be said, first of all, that nature has been striking back against the ceaseless explorations and expansions of human beings, against the "human parasite," for as long as men have roamed the earth.

In *Plagues and Peoples*, which appeared in 1977, William McNeill pointed out that the full development of central and southern China was probably delayed for five or six centuries by the "disease barrier" that the Yangtze River and the warmer climate of the south created. The effort to explore and to civilize the New World probably brought syphilis back to Europe, where it raged as the AIDS of its time throughout the sixteenth century; and typhus came to Europe at the end of the fifteenth century when Spanish soldiers picked up the infection fighting in Cyprus. That HIV and its kin should have been loosed from the rainforest by the environmental disruptions of the past twenty years, in other words, is hardly unprecedented. When it comes to "remodeling" natural environments, McNeill writes, man has been very good at dealing with what can be seen and can be manipulated. But there are things that cannot be seen and cannot be manipulated, and

> human intelligence remained for thousands of years only fumblingly effective in dealing with disease-causing microorganisms. As a result the ravages of disease among crops, herds and peoples played a significant part in human affairs throughout historic time.

McNeill's point, however, is that while man's efforts to "remodel" his environment are sometimes a source of new disease, they are seldom a source of serious epidemic disease. Quite the opposite. As humans and new microorganisms interact, they begin to accommodate each other. Human populations slowly build up resistance to circulating infections. What were once virulent infections, such as syphilis, become attenuated. Over time, diseases of adults, such as measles and chicken pox, become limited to children, whose immune systems are still naïve. McNeill remarks that it was during the mid-fifteenth century that the population of Europe began to expand steadily, even though "it was during these decades that the oceanic discoveries took place, and European sailors

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had the opportunity to import new infections into their homelands from the ports of all the earth." Precisely because they had been exposed to these microorganisms, the Europeans were hardened to their effects.

This, says McNeill, is the paradox of infection: "The more diseased a community, the less destructive its epidemics become." Who, after all, suffered the most from the discovery of the New World? Not the conquerors, the ones who were despoiling a virgin environment. It was the conquered, the American Indians, the peoples living on a secluded and pristine continent, who were all but wiped out by the sudden arrival of smallpox. This does not mean, of course, that we should not worry about the effects of man's continuing assault on nature. But it does mean that there is nothing inherently terrifying about the fact that the West is now being exposed to new microbes from equatorial Africa. We are ultimately safer in a world where new viruses and bacteria are in constant circulation, and where human populations can encounter and build defenses against them. Unlocking the viruses of the rainforest is part of the way we tame nature, not the way nature tames us.

One can go further. Sometimes disrupting the environment is the way we get rid of disease. In England in the seventeenth century, for example, farmers began disrupting nature by raising livestock on a large scale for the first time. What happened? Malaria-carrying mosquitoes, which used to feed on people, switched to cattle. And since cattle aren't an hospitable host for the malarial plasmodium, the disease, which had been endemic in Britain for centuries, retreated from the British Isles for good. Or consider Russia in the eighteenth century, when the natural ecosystem of the countryside began to be disrupted by the aggressive expansion of agriculture into areas that had previously been wilderness. The plowing of fallow land destroyed the natural habitat of the rats that carried the bubonic plague. Thus freed of plague, which had been a persistent problem in Russia long after the disease left the rest of Europe, the Russian population grew from 12.5 million in 1724 to 21 million by the end of the eighteenth century.

The point is that the relationship between environment and disease is a complicated one. There are diseases that are caused by environmental disruption, diseases that are eliminated by environmental disruption and diseases whose rise has nothing to do with environmental disruption. The current plague paranoia is an obsession with the first category. Thus Garrett is very convincing when she talks about how the new cities of the Third World—overpopulated, vastly underserved by medical care, troubled by appalling sanitary conditions—are breeding grounds for new infections. But this is not an accurate diagnosis of all new diseases.

Garrett, for example, writes a long and intelligent chapter on the worrying rise of new bacterial strains that are resistant to the antibiotics that once cured them easily. But what does this have to do with mankind's environmental responsibility? Antibiotic resistance is the result of shoddy infection control procedures in hospitals, well-meaning but ill-advised overprescription of certain drugs by physicians and the fact that the pharmaceutical industry got cocky in the late 1980s and stopped developing new classes of antibiotics. We could preserve every acre of rainforest the world over, clean up every river and stop every war, and we would still have a raging antibiotic resistance problem.

Even in cases where environmental disruptions do seem to have played a role in the emergence of disease, it is not the overwhelming factor that Preston and Garrett imply. HIV may have been loosed from the jungle by the upheaval in Africa during the 1970s. Still, absent epidemic levels of unsafe promiscuous sex and intravenous needle use in the West, the virus would have gone nowhere. The critical factor with AIDS, and with an awful lot of the diseases that we face, is what we do to ourselves and each other, not what we do to our environment.

But these are, to some extent, side issues. There is no question that for whatever reason, as a result of what man does to himself or what he does to his environment, the threat of infectious disease is on the rise in the world right now. The re-emergence of tuberculosis and untreatable strains of malaria, for example, are worrisome trends. Should we be scared? Well, yes and no. In his brilliant study, *Evolution of Infectious Disease*, Paul Ewald describes how the chaos at the end of the First World War directly contributed to the rise of an unusually vicious strain of influenza. The result was the influenza pandemic of 1918, which left 20 million people dead. This could happen again. But whether or not some new virus could emerge that could wipe us all out is an entirely different matter. It is simply very difficult to imagine where such a super-virus would come from or what it would look like.

Let's start with Ebola. Preston argues that Ebola, under the right conditions, could obliterate a significant chunk of humanity. "If the Ebola Sudan virus had managed to spread out of central Africa," he writes of one of the first known Ebola outbreaks, "it might have entered Khartoum in a few weeks, penetrated Cairo a few weeks after that, and from there it would have hopped to Athens, New York, Paris, London, Singapore—it would have gone everywhere on the planet. Yet that never happened.... For reasons that are not clear, the outbreak subsided."

But this is simply not true. The reason for the abatement of the outbreak is entirely clear. Ebola kills its victims too quickly. It is one of the fundamental rules of infectious diseases, which Preston no more than hints at, that the deadlier they are to the people they infect, the less dangerous they are to everyone else. Ebola kills within two weeks, and during those two weeks it is not as if its victims are walking around meeting and infecting hundreds of unsuspecting others the way someone with a cold does. After only a brief incubation period, they are at home or in the hospital, immediately, obviously and unambiguously sick, with limited contact with the outside world. How much chance, then, do they have to pass on their disease?

This is why Ebola causes outbreaks, not epidemics. It cannot sustain itself. Ironically, the outbreak in Zaire that has so clearly boosted the visibility and the sales of *The Hot Zone* is also the event that most emphatically demonstrates the book's dishonesty on this point. Here was a crowded, filthy slum, crammed with 500,000 people under the worst sanitary conditions: an ideal breeding ground, in short, for an epidemic. And how far did Ebola get? Two hundred people. Maybe a few dozen more. Ebola Sudan was as likely to get to the moon as it was (in Preston's hyperbolic formulation) to leave Central Africa and find its way to Athens, Paris, London and Singapore.

An airborne version of Ebola, of course, is a different matter. Had the Reston strain of Ebola been lethal to humans, Preston is quite right in arguing that it would have posed a terrifying health threat. But not *that* terrifying, since airborne Ebola would still face the same selection pressures as normal Ebola. There are strains of influenza virus, for example, that are capable of killing just as quickly and as implacably as Ebola. But when flu season comes every year to America, the flu strain that ends up infecting most people is so weakened that it kills only some of the very oldest and frailest of the elderly.

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Why? Because a very nasty flu virus simply cannot survive for very long. The people who get infected with it get sick very quickly, and so severely that they go home and lie in their beds. The strain dies with them. And the strains that survive are the milder ones, the ones that keep the infected well enough that they can still go to work and keep on infecting others. The 1918 strain was, in some ways, an abberation. Because of wartime conditions, it started out nastier—and stayed nastier longer—than flu usually does. But even that virus, as vicious a virus as we have ever seen, eventually hit a wall. Airborne Ebola would, like the 1918 flu virus, cut a deadly swath through those at the center of the epidemic. But Ebola, like the flu, mutates rapidly, producing a wide variety of strains in intense evolutionary competition, and so there is every reason to believe that it, too, would soon burn itself out.

What would a real Andromeda Strain look like? It would be highly infectious like the flu, spread through casual contact. But it would also have to be structured in such a way as to avoid the kind of selection bias that usually exists against virulent strains. For that reason, it would need to move stealthily through its host, infecting so silently that the victim would not know to take precautions, and so slowly that the victim would have years in which pass on the infection to someone else.

The Andromeda Strain, in short, the virus that really could kill 80 or 90 percent of humanity, would be an airborne version of HIV. In fact, doomsday types have for years been conjuring up this possibility for the end of mankind. The problem, however, is that it is very difficult to imagine how such a super-virus could ever come about. For a start, it is not clear how HIV could become airborne and still be lethal. (This was the argument of Howard Temin, the late Nobel Prize-winning virologist.) What makes HIV so dangerous is that it seeks out and selectively kills the key blood cells of the human immune system. To be airborne, it would have to shift its preference to the cells of the respiratory system. (Ebola, which is not nearly so selective, probably doesn't need to change personality to become airborne.) How, then, could it still cause AIDS? Why wouldn't it be just another cold virus?

Then there is the problem of mutation. To become airborne, HIV would have to evolve in such a way as to become more durable. Right now the virus is highly sensitive to changes in temperature and light. But it is hardly going to do any damage if it dies the moment it is coughed into the air and exposed to ultraviolet rays. HIV would have to get as tough as a cold virus, which can live for days on a countertop or a doorknob. At the same time HIV would have to get more flexible. Right now HIV mutates in only a limited manner. The virus essentially keeps changing its clothes, but its inner workings stay the same. It kills everyone by infecting the same key blood cells. To become airborne, it would have to undergo a truly fundamental transformation, switching to an entirely different class of cells. How can HIV make two contradictory changes at the same time, becoming both less and more flexible?

This is what is wrong with the Andromeda Strain argument. Every infectious agent that has ever plagued humanity has had to adopt a specific strategy, but every strategy carries a corresponding cost, and this makes human counterattack possible. Malaria is vicious and deadly, but it relies on mosquitoes to spread from one human to the next, which means that draining swamps and putting up mosquito netting can all but halt endemic malaria. Smallpox is extraordinarily durable, remaining infectious in the environment for years, but its very durability, its essential rigidity, is what makes it one of the easiest microbes to create a vaccine against. AIDS is almost invariably lethal because its attacks the body at its point of great vulnerability, that is, the immune system, but the fact that it targets blood cells is what makes it so relatively uninfectious.

I could go on, but the point is obvious. Any microbe capable of wiping us all out would have to be everything at once: as contagious as flu, as durable as the cold, as lethal as Ebola, as stealthy as HIV and so doggedly resistant to mutation that it would stay deadly over the course of a long epidemic. But viruses are not, well, superhuman. They cannot do everything at once. It is one of the ironies of the analysis of alarmists such as Preston that they are all too willing to point out the limitations of human beings, but they neglect to point out the limitations of microscopic life forms.

If there are any conclusions to be drawn about disease, they are actually the opposite of what is imagined in books such as *The Hot Zone* and *The Coming Plague*. It is true that the effect of the dramatic demographic and social changes in the world over the past few decades is to create new opportunities for disease. But they are likely to create not homogeneous patterns of disease, as humans experienced in the past, so much as heterogeneous patterns of disease. People are traveling more and living in different combinations. Gene pools that were once distinct are mixing through intermarriage. Adults who once would have died in middle age are now living into their 80s. Children with particular genetic configurations who once died at birth or in infancy are now living longer lives. If you talk to demographers, they will tell you that what they anticipate is increasing clusters of new and odd diseases moving into these new genetic and demographic niches. Rare diseases will be showing up in greater numbers. Entirely unknown diseases will emerge for the first time. But the same diversity that created them within those population subgroups will keep them there. Laurie Garrett's book is mistitled. We are not facing "the coming plague." We are facing "the coming outbreaks."

V.

Illness, as Susan Sontag has shown, is often metaphor. Cancer is saddled with connotations of embarrassment or punishment, and AIDS, as Sontag wrote in *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, has come to assume that same position, to be described as a disease caused by an infectious agent, an enemy, from the outside. "This is the language of political paranoia, with its characteristic distrust of a pluralistic world," and it is such language that has made it difficult to combat the discrimination and stigma that surround HIV. It is not difficult to see that Ebola has fallen prey to the same process.

Judging by Preston and company, Ebola is not simply a disease. It is a punishment for our environmental crimes, nature's curse against humanity. And, with this added weight of metaphor, this most marginal of viruses has become the symbol of biological apocalypse. "The most terrifying diseases are those perceived not just as lethal but as dehumanizing, literally so," Sontag writes. The rabies phobia in nineteenth-century France, marked by countless cases of imagined infection, was driven by the fantasy that the disease "unleashed uncontrollable sexual, blasphemous impulses." Cholera was more feared than smallpox in the nineteenth century, despite the fact it killed far fewer people,

> because of the suddenness with which it struck and the indignity of the symptoms: fulminant diarrhea and vomiting, whose result anticipated the horror of post-mortem decomposition. Within several hours radical dehydration shrank the patient into a wizened caricature of his or her former self, the skin turned bluish black.

Sontag could just as easily be describing Ebola. The difference, of course, is that

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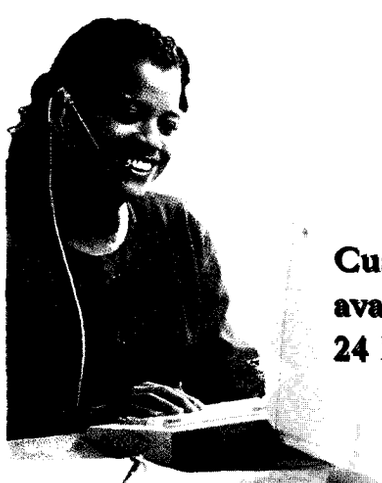

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AIDS and cancer and cholera are genuine problems. Those who fantasize about them, or construct metaphors about them, do so on the basis of experience. Ebola, and the mythical Andromeda Strain that it is supposed to portend, are imaginary threats.

There are any number of explanations for what has created our epidemic obsession. Hysteria is cyclical, and there is clearly the same kind of social insecurity afoot today as there was in paranoid times past. But let us consider just what the contemporary hysteria exposes about our attitude toward medicine. To read accounts of the earliest successful advances in medical science is to be struck by the frequency with which solutions preceded understanding. Nobody knew exactly why the earliest smallpox vaccine worked, they just knew that it prevented smallpox. There was something very comforting about this. It served to bolster the idea in the public that there was something magical about medicine: even when what we knew did not add up to a solution, a solution could still be found.

The relationship between medical solutions and medical understanding has now been reversed. To attend any of the massive international AIDS conferences in the early 1990s was to be struck by just how incredibly detailed our knowledge of HIV and AIDS has become. Rarely a month goes by without one of the major medical journals announcing the discovery of a new gene implicated in cancer or the decoding of some pathological cellular process. For all these announcements and alleged breakthroughs, however, medical science's actual progress in prolonging or saving the lives of those with cancer or AIDS has appeared stubbornly slow. The dominant symbols of technological advancement over the past two decades have been diagnostic tools: CAT scans, PET-scans, MRIs, advanced mammography, ultrasound. Physicians seem to have improved their ability to diagnose disease much faster than their ability to treat it.

It goes without saying that this impression about contemporary medicine is inaccurate. The reason that medicine seems to be accumulating knowledge faster than it is accumulating mastery is that we pay a lot more attention to the accumulation of knowledge than we ever did. No one wrote about Koch's preliminary experiments with smallpox in the nineteenth century in the newspapers of the day. Cancer is also a harder problem than smallpox ever was. But these subtleties are easily overlooked. The truth is that Americans have come to fundamentally change their view of medicine. It is not that they have lost faith in it. They have redefined it. Medicine is no longer the savior, it is the explainer. Scientists do not cure, they investigate. The idea that medicine works magic is disappearing. Even when what we know appears to add up to a solution, there is no longer any confidence that a solution can be found.

This is what the Ebola paranoia is all about. The heroes of *The Hot Zone* are not people working to treat or to cure the virus. They are the people who track its progress around the globe, who set out on expeditions through the forest to find its natural host. They are analysts, describers. On the question of what to do about Ebola, how to prevent another outbreak, how to better treat the disease, they are largely silent. This is a striking omission in a work of science journalism. Before Preston, the popular science book was almost always a mystery story: a vexing scientific puzzle arises, a hero shuns family and sleep to investigate, a solution is found. But *The Hot Zone* is not a mystery story. It is a horror story, and at the end of the story the horror remains at large.

The Coming Plague, too, is almost entirely given over to description. For 600 pages, Garrett brings science in all its glory to bear on the question of why the variety of scourges facing mankind arose just when they did. But when it comes to writing about solutions, she delivers twenty-five pages. And her final advice is so broad as to be useless: man must be nicer to nature. Books more scrupulous than Preston's and Garrett's would have pointed out that what we have learned about infectious disease suggests that we should not fear extinction, that our ability to understand a threat and act accordingly is what separates us from the chickens of Pennsylvania. But what we have been given, instead, and what we have accepted uncritically, is medicine in retreat, and science as the passive observer of events. In this incarnation, science excels only at making the unimaginable imaginable and the incomprehensible comprehensible. It does not inspire courage. It inspires fear. It is good at creating helplessness. It is not good at dispelling it. •

The Mailer Commission

BY PAUL BERMAN

Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery by Norman Mailer

(Random House, 829 pp., $30)

The key is the subtitle, "An American Mystery." In case you miss his point, Norman Mailer tells us that during her years in Minsk, Marina Prusakova, who will later marry Lee Harvey Oswald, regarded Theodore Dreiser as her favorite writer—preferred him to Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev and everyone else. And if that is still not clear enough, at the very end of the book Mailer invokes *An American Tragedy* by name, just to hammer home the nail.

Dreiser is famous for indulging in gassy philosophical posturings, repetitions, wordiness and all kinds of gaucheries that are perhaps not as gauche as they appear; but beneath the seeming awkwardness he was, in his way, a writer of extreme discipline. The efficiency consisted of piling up tiny physical details and noting every possible petty motive and impulse in order to show that human events are driven by irresistible material forces—sometimes by the pressures of social class, sometimes by "chemisms" from within the individual personality. The tiny details and physical urges grow denser and denser, the protagonist of *An American Tragedy*, Clyde Griffiths, moves ever closer to the half-fumbled murder of his girlfriend and then toward his own execution, and you, the reader, sink ever deeper into your armchair of anxiety and dread. It is because everything seems so horribly unavoidable.

Mailer is much nimbler than Dreiser, but in *An American Mystery* he, too, adopts an awkward prose, advertised at the start in a note to the readers, like one of those explanations of Russian patronymics that precede the translation of a Russian novel. Only Mailer's note explains that, in order to retain a properly Russian mood, the writer will delete a few definite and indefinite articles,

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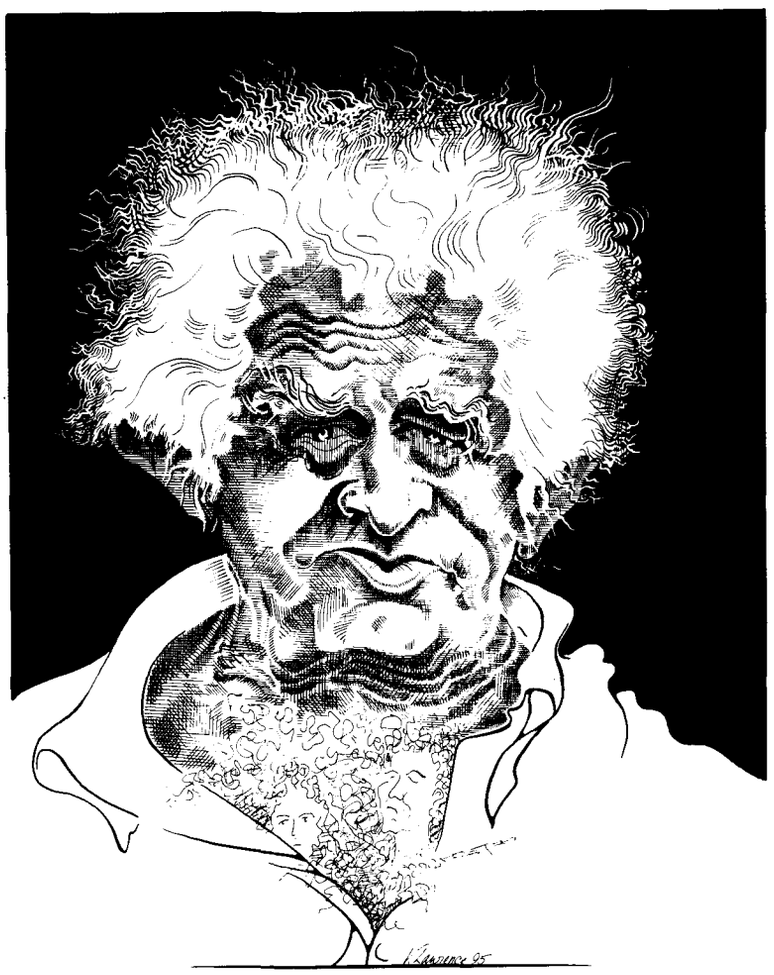
Russian-style, and take, as he says, "small liberties with King's English," which is a habit that turns out to be rich in humor and pathos. And with the ungainliness wittily established, he plunges into his story of Oswald's defection to the Soviet Union in 1959, the marriage to Marina in Minsk, the history of Marina's family, the return from the Soviet Union and the arrival in Dallas in 1963 and all the rest—and Mailer, too, exactly like Dreiser, focuses with obsessive attentiveness on certain kinds of tiny physical details and petty motives.

He begins with police procedures. The KGB, professionally suspicious of Oswald, sets out to tail, bug and generally observe and analyze him from the moment of his arrival on Soviet soil, with documentary results that Mailer has been able to examine (and to confirm by interviewing a couple of the agents on the case). These agents want to know if Oswald's ignorance of the Russian language is merely a pretense, disguising a well-trained master spy's knowledge. That can be discovered by noticing any inexplicable forward leaps in his progress at learning the language. They learn that Oswald has bought a gun and gone hunting and has failed to hit a single thing. "How was it that a former Marine with a Sharpshooter rating back in his U.S. Marine Corps—yes, KGB had information that he was not a bad shot—could miss his targets so?" It is puzzling. "If they had had any inkling that he would later be suspected of carrying out a crime of high magnitude—of highest magnitude!—they would have studied his marksmanship in a more detailed manner." But they study everything else.



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We see the petty chemisms of sex. The tizzy in the KGB that is set off by Oswald's arrival in the Soviet Union is matched by a tizzy among the young women of Moscow and Minsk. "How do we get to meet this guy?" they ask. And Mailer records the results with more exactitude than you would think possible (except that his collaborator, Lawrence Schiller, familiar to Mailer's readers as the interviewer behind *The Executioner's Song*, is evidently a genius at bringing out the little points). We learn that the pretty young women sent in Oswald's direction by the Soviet tourist agency (with the KGB in the background, naturally) are not unattracted themselves, though nothing more than hand-patting ever takes place. We learn that Oswald is drawn to small-boned women, though at one point he takes up with a big-boned one. He proposes marriage to a fellow radio factory worker (his own diary records: "a silky black-haired Jewish beauty with fine dark eyes, skin as white as snow... still a virgin"). But the black-haired beauty prefers men with wider shoulders.

We learn a good deal about Marina's sexual history, possibly more than was ever true: her persecution as a teenager by oafish machos in Leningrad; her friend the Leningrad prostitute, and her own drift in that direction, sufficient to cadge meals out of men and to cause a lot of malicious gossip about her in Minsk; her rape by an Afghani who took her for an already-paid prostitute; her loves and flirtations. We learn that, at least with one of her lovers, she won't do oral sex. No foot fetishism, either. We learn about the middle-aged Minsker who, in the mid-1990s, still sighs for the Marina Prusakova of more than thirty years ago. We even get a sense of the sex life of Mr. and Mrs. Oswald in the privacy of their home, since the KGB rented the privacy of the home next door, and the transcripts of what they recorded end up in Mailer's hands. Marina herself offers a few recollections.

You might wonder: Why so little attention in Mailer's book to international politics, the personalities of world leaders, the effects of social class or a dozen other possible influences on events? But what he provides is entirely sufficient. The operations of a secret police bureaucracy and the urgings of sex and sexual customs turn out to have in common the quality of being unstoppable, pitiless and concentrated on ridiculously minuscule details. And through the double lens of these details, we begin to detect a Dreiser-like universe where a thousand tiny irresistible forces are at work, and the universe has a shape, and its shape is not very appealing, and nothing good is going to come of all this.

Then again, we also detect a few un-Dreiserian anomalies. In the first, more brilliant part of Mailer's book, "Oswald in Minsk with Marina," the characters are police agents, radio factory workers, Oswald's various girlfriends, Marina's aunt and uncle and other residents of Minsk, all of whom live fairly normal existences, though constrained by a nearly inconceivable (to Americans) housing shortage. But behind the gray normality we see, in the historical background, the faces of Nazi soldiers from the Second World War, prison camps run by the German army, mass exterminations. We learn almost casually that, when the Jews of Minsk were buried in a mass grave, the ground continued to shift because some of those buried people were still alive. This is not so normal.

We get a sense that more than an apartment shortage is constraining Soviet life. Marina's father, a good man (as he is remembered), disappears—apparently into the Gulag prison system. The

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uncle who brings her up works, as we discover, in the particular field of industry that manufactures furniture with prison labor. This is not the atmosphere that you find in the grim Indiana naturalism of Theodore Dreiser. In *An American Tragedy*, the destiny created by chemisms and class forces accounts for nearly everything that happens, and we see a universe that is hard and cruel and perfectly intelligible. But in *An American Mystery*, the sexual tastes and police procedures can plausibly account for only a certain portion of Soviet life, and beyond that portion a principle of insanity seems to govern, and nothing is intelligible.

Something odd occupies the center of Mailer's picture, too. Lee Harvey leaves us a little baffled, not because of some failing on the author's part. The Oswald who boasts about being named after Robert E. Lee and then becomes a Communist sympathizer; then joins the Marines; then defects to the Soviet Union; then attempts suicide; then quietly goes about his working-class life in Minsk; then marries a Russian girl while secretly planning to defect from his defection—this figure is impossible to understand in any conventional way. We begin to suspect that, if lunacy on the scale of powerful dictatorships is hovering around the periphery of Mailer's normal Soviet world, another lunacy, on the scale of a single pathetic individual, is hovering at the very center, in the person of Oswald himself.

But neither the peripheral lunacies nor the central one are ever treated as such. In the Soviet Union, people live their lives as if a background of Nazi extermination and Gulag terror were an ordinary past for ordinary citizens; and in the Soviet Union and in America, too, people meet Oswald and accept him as just another dull and uninteresting feature of a colorless world (though we do observe an occasional person noticing that Oswald is, in the words of a State Department memo about him from 1962, "an unstable character, whose actions are entirely unpredictable"). One day in New Orleans Oswald takes his rifle and shoots at General Edwin A. Walker, then returns home, explains to Marina what he has done and goes to sleep; and, though she is shocked and upset, she, too, decides it is time to sleep and climbs into the bed "where he was spread out, arms and legs extended, his bare bottom up, his backside open to the night air." And from a steady accumulation of incidents like that a very un-Dreiserian anxiety begins to exude. *An American Tragedy* makes us worry that the universe is determined; *An American Mystery* makes us worry that it is not. That is the difference between tragedy and mystery.

We begin to worry about Mailer himself (which has, of course, always been a technique of his, not always perfectly controlled). He seems to be, at some level, a man of such good sense—but what are we to make of those insistent sexual details? We read onward, expecting them to be the road to Dallas. But the pages turn and Dallas seems no closer, and we start to wonder why he is going on at such length. A man named Yuri tells locker-room tall tales about Marina's superpromiscuity and hooker past, which Mailer himself eventually dismisses as so much blarney. But the dismissal comes late, and meanwhile we get the blarney, and we begin to wonder if Mailer, too, isn't a locker-room tale-teller, enjoying the sex talk for its own titillation and not for any larger purpose.

At one point Marina herself—the Marina of today, the Texas matron, exhausted by five days of questions from the Mailer research team—is asked whether she had used something from a pharmacy to convince Lee of her virginity on their wedding night. And she explodes: "Okay. It's true. So? So you are a sex pervert to spend five days to get somebody to talk about subject like this." And we suspect she may be on to something. She is asked about Lee's performance as a lover, and she explodes again: "Nobody asks Jacqueline Kennedy what Jack Kennedy was like in bed." A good point! But that only adds one more layer of strangeness to what Mailer has done. Literary naturalism in its heyday was always devoted to an obsessional concern with a tiny number of elements of life—Dreiser's chemisms and social classes, Zola's family genetics, Jack London's Darwinian struggle. But instead of noticing the obsessional quality, you were supposed to see in it a scientific approach to reality (and with these writers that is exactly what you see). In Mailer's book on Oswald, however, the author himself, by means of that angry accusation from Marina, draws your attention to the obsessive aspect of his own hunt for intrusive details.

The result is a book in which the immediate backgrounds that are historical and political radiate demonic evil; in which the central protagonist, Oswald, appears to be a free molecule of insanity, circulating around the universe on the basis of no identifiable principle; in which the narrative method of the book itself gives off an occasional shimmer of sexual prurience; yet which is written in a tone of sheer fact-accumulation (for the most part). It is as if we were pretending still to be living in an era of scientific rationality, when all the while we see with perfect clarity that ours is an era beyond any possibility of rational explanation.

Mailer has the discipline to say almost nothing about the larger political or social meaning of Kennedy's assassination, aside from a few wearisome remarks about Kennedy as the finest specimen of man that America could claim. But even those of us with no patience for the romantic Kennedy cult come to the book all too aware of the damage done to American society by Oswald's deed. On the topic of superpower rivalry, Mailer likewise refrains from saying very much. But the story that he tells makes us think about it anyway, and about the lurking possibility of Hot War (which is alluded to only once, when Mailer tells us that Lyndon Johnson took a plane from Dallas back to Washington with unseemly haste out of concern that Kennedy's assassination might just possibly have been a first step in a Soviet military attack). And so, this very clever narrative structure of Mailer's, this seemingly frozen determinism surrounded by hot insanity, turns out to be something of a metaphor, and we see in it the history of totalitarianism and the fragility of American society and the scary unpredictability of a cold war in which Kennedy's assassination was merely an exceptionally nutty episode.

About the second part of *Oswald's Tale*, "Oswald in America," Mailer himself offers a bit of an apology, with the explanation that everything he has found in the ex-Soviet Union was fresh and new (if only because the Soviet window on the Kennedy assassination was boarded up until Mailer himself and his team were allowed to peer through it), whereas every corner of Oswald's life in America has been searched a thousand times. For that reason the first part is based almost entirely on fresh investigations, and the second part is based in large part on Mailer's reworking of books by other authors, supplemented by excerpts from the encyclopedic Warren Commission hearings (a "Britannica devoted to only one subject") and additional interviews by himself and his team. But the main difference has to do with Mailer's greater willingness, in the American part, to hazard a few flights of his own imagination.

Some of these merely take the sexual investigations from the Russian part and push them beyond the realm of evidence, mostly by suggesting that Oswald, deep beneath his heterosexual exterior, is homosexually inclined (which, due to the extreme homophobic spirit of the age, might help explain why he goes

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crazy). Anything is possible, but in Oswald's case, the main reason to think so is some ribbing about homosexuality that he received in the Marine Corps, plus the fact that someone once saw him attend a drag show. Anybody who has read Randy Shilts's *Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Military*, will know, however, that military homosexuality consists of a vast subculture whose secret participants are anything but secret to one another. It's hard to imagine that after thirty years, with many excellent civic reasons for standing up and revealing the truth, none of those secret participants would have stood up, unless there is, on this matter, no truth to reveal. Mailer tells us that one of Oswald's fellow Marines was unaccountably murdered during Oswald's tour of duty, and he speculates that Oswald himself might have killed the man in the course of a sexual act, but that is sheerest guesswork on Mailer's part, and the lack of any evidence at all serves only to make us raise an eyebrow at the author's daffy theorizing.

Some other speculations stand on surer ground. Mailer proposes to take Oswald seriously, to look for a more-or-less reasonable motive in him or at least a motive that can be appreciated as some kind of human impulse, and by guessing about Oswald in that manner, Mailer stumbles on some striking evidences of Oswald's loony grandiosity—his affirmation, for instance, that, come the revolution, he will have no interest in assuming state power, which is egomaniacally modest of him to say. But having turned up a few insights, Mailer can't help himself, and in a couple of passages, he gives us a whiff of his own personal philosophy. "Let us recognize," he tells us (and now the gas rises from the page),

> that it makes some difference to our commonweal, each and every time, whether an act of murder is visionless and mindless or is a cry of wrath that rises from a skewed heart maddened by its own vision of injustice.
>
> We have come at least to the philosophical crux of our inquiry: It would state that the sudden death of a man as large in his possibilities as John Fitzgerald Kennedy is more tolerable if we can perceive his killer as tragic rather than absurd.

More than 400 pages later (the entire book is more than 800 pages, if you count the notes), he returns to the theme, in considering the possibility that Oswald may figure within a larger conspiracy:

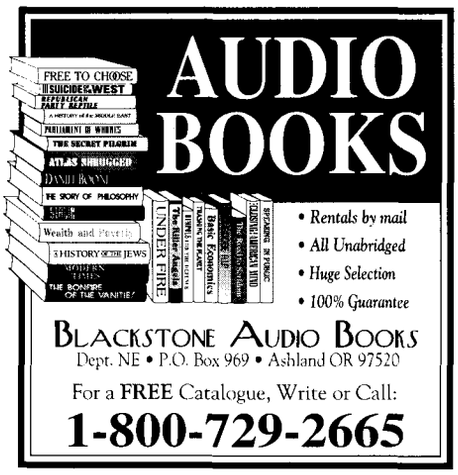
> Given the yeast-like propensities of conspiracy to expand and expand as one looks to buttress each explanation, it can hardly be difficult for the reader to understand why it is more agreeable to keep to one's developing concept of Oswald as a protagonist, a man to whom, grudgingly, we must give a bit of stature when we take into account the modesty of his origins. That, to repeat, can provide us with a sense of the tragic rather than the absurd. If a figure as large as Kennedy is cheated abruptly of his life, we feel better, inexplicably better, if his killer is also not without size.... Tragedy is vastly preferable to absurdity. Such is the vested interest that adheres to perceiving Oswald as a tragic and infuriating hero (or, if you will, anti-hero) rather than as a snarling little wife-abuser or a patsy.

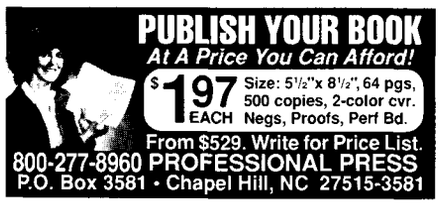
But these passages make no sense at all, if the rest of the book is to be believed. For though Mailer has not wasted our time in trying to take Oswald seriously, the principal result of those inquiries has been to discover an unbridgeable incoherence in Oswald's thinking. The assassin *was* a snarling little wife-abuser, and he was *not* a hero, nor an anti-hero, judging by Mailer's own study of the man. Tragedy may well be preferable to absurdity; yet absurdity is the ever-recurring note in Mailer's book. Why Mailer has written the two philosophical passages that I have quoted is hard to know—except that philosophical passages like these probably come to him in his sleep, and no matter what he really thinks about a given issue, he thinks that he thinks his usual thoughts. Or perhaps Mailer has shrunk at what his own book reveals, and is desperate to restore a sense of meaning and order to the universe, and has reached for his customary doctrine of existential risk and courage, the way someone else might turn to the comforts of theology.

The author of *An American Mystery* would rather write anything but mystery, as he tells us in the last of his references to Dreiser. In any case, these slight philosophical passages have had a bad effect, I think, on how *Oswald's Tale* has been interpreted. It is part of a book reviewer's craft to go looking for passages like these and to incorporate them into reviews (they make the reviewer's job so much simpler), which means that Mailer's bursts of philosophy, insignificant and misleading as they are, have been quoted and requoted in public discussions of the book, until they have assumed a programmatic importance that was never deserved.

But there is worse. Every single one of the ten thousand observed details that Mailer piles up regarding Oswald militates against the possibility that Oswald could have participated in a conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy. We perceive with exceptional clarity that Oswald is an extremely isolated man; gets along badly with others; is not happy about subordinating himself; demands devotion from others, and does not offer it in return; is ideologically rudderless; cannot be relied on to stick to his commitments; and arouses a suspicion of insanity in at least some of the people he encounters. A less likely figure to be recruited into a conspiracy is hard to imagine. Mailer himself, in a lucid passage, says exactly that. *Oswald's Tale* can only be regarded as yet another, the umpteenth, dismissal of the conspiracy thesis, this time on the novel and novelistic grounds of a close study of the assassin's character. Yet Mailer insists on taking the thesis seriously.

This aspect of *Oswald's Tale* I find to be extremely irritating and frustrating. If the conspiracy is real, then the entire

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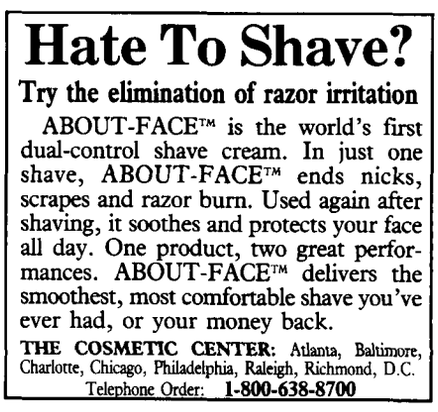
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book has been written from the wrong angle, which is not pleasant to consider, and if the conspiracy is a will-'o-the-wisp, why must we interrupt our reading about Oswald and his circle of acquaintances to go chasing it? The only interesting literary possibility that is raised by the conspiracy theory, it seems to me, would be to show once again how people in either the United States or the Soviet Union will do anything they can to avoid recognizing the irrationality of historical events, and will walk around pretending that Stalinist terror doesn't exist, or will construct ridiculous theories to explain why America's president was shot. But Mailer accepts the conspiracy theories on their own terms, not as symptoms of fear, and gravely considers them as actual possibilities, to be weighed and judged.

And so, having begun his book by invoking Theodore Dreiser, Mailer runs steadily downhill until, by the middle of the second part, he is invoking the authors of books on the conspiracy theory and ostentatiously taking a stand of admirable independence among them, showing how Gerald Posner, the author of *Case Closed* (an anti-conspiracy book), has gotten some points wrong, and how Carl Oglesby, the author of *The Yankee and Cowboy War* (a pro-conspiracy book), has made some astute observations; and how even so, the conspiracy is only 25 percent likely. All of which could hardly be in greater contradiction with what Mailer has done in the rest of his book.

There are two Mailers, I would say: a man of the 1930s, attracted to the discipline of the naturalists and the realists (but knowing too much to be one of those writers himself); and a man of the 1960s, attracted to the fantasmagoria of the mystics and screwballs (but too smart, except sometimes, to take his own fantasmagoria entirely seriously); and in *Oswald's Tale* he has tripped over this double identity, and has been unable to recognize that, in this book anyway, the Mailer of the '60s can only be an impediment when it comes to writing a book about what was one of the most important events of the '60s.

Are these points of philosophical incoherence fatal to the book? I don't think they are. For what is the purpose of a coherent metaphysical view of the universe in the work of a novelist? A consistent metaphysical view may be interesting in itself, if a writer can bring it off; but the main thing is to keep the writer alert, trained on his characters and their actions, attentive to the tiniest displays of human personality and therefore able to lend his book a feeling of urgency and life. And this the author of *Oswald's Tale* manages to do fairly consistently. He shows us Oswald taking his shot from the window at the Book Depository, and he imagines what a shock it must have been, once the deed was done, for Oswald to descend to Dealey Plaza and find himself plunged into reality, and the acuity of the author's imagination is no small thing:

> He has been centered on his mission, balanced on his own heartbeat, living in a sense of dread and expectation so intense that it is beyond agitation. He possesses the kind of inner silence some can know when ultimates are coming to a moment of decision: Will he have the courage to fire his rifle and will he shoot well? Everything else, including the mounting tempo of excitement in the crowds outside the Book Depository, has no more presence for him than the murmur of a passer-by. Stationed within himself, he has now descended to those depths where one waits for final judgment....
>
> Stepping out in Dealey Plaza, therefore, must have been not unlike being hurled through a plate-glass window. Hundreds of people were milling around in disconnected hysteria....
>
> If the act of firing upon Kennedy had taken place as an event staged between himself and his vision of a great and thunderous stroke that would lift him at once from the mediocre to the immortal, this vision would not have included anyone else. Not even the victim.
>
> Now, however, everybody around him is distraught.... It is a scene alien to him. He hurries down the street away from the Book Depository until, several blocks away, he catches a bus.
>
> On it is Mrs. Bledsoe, the same landlady who had cheated him of $2 in the first week he was back in Dallas after Mexico.

All That Talk About 'High-Tech' in the Future Notwithstanding, Why the 21st Century Might Well Turn Out to Be Full of a Whole Lot of Clumsy People!

A great many people who are clumsy
will exist, almost certainly,
in the 21st century
That will be because
their forebears
reproduced disproportionately,
Due to their inability
to tear the little tinfoil covers
off condoms properly
—Thus, ripping their rubbers in the process!

Oh, graceful children!
you will have to learn to live with them (all those clumsy ones!)
& When you step outside your doors
Perhaps wear plastic
shoulderguards
& hockey shin-guards
& even crash helmets
& maybe metal-toed shoes
Because the heirs of all those clumsy people
will keep on running straight into you on the street

—& Learn to properly utilize earplugs, too,
Because of the sounds of things crashing to the ground incessantly

from being
dropped
or fall-
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Michael Benedikt

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Mailer now quotes the transcript of the Warren Commission:

> MRS. BLEDSOE: . . . Oswald got on. He looks like a maniac.

Of course! At the conclusion of volume one, Mailer interprets Marina's reaction:

> She would say that the most humiliating thing that she ever experienced was on her walk from the police car to the police station after they told her that Lee had been arrested.
>
> The police brought her out of the car, and she had to walk—she didn't know how far; it looked forever. Maybe it was some short distance; she does not recall. But, such shame—the most degrading, humiliating moment ever in her life. Just by going from car to building. Reporters were shouting, and it was nothing she could understand. She wished some earth would swallow her. She even believed that Lee had committed this crime, because she believed all American authorities. She blindly believed them. . . . Then she walked through a tunnel filled with reporters. Jammed. She couldn't believe it. This nightmare had herself in it. Leading role! She was playing a sleepwalker.
>
> All of a sudden someone shouted to her in Russian: "Mrs. Oswald, did your husband kill America's President?" That Russian voice kind of woke her up. Fortunately. She was feeling as if she could have drifted out of everything forever. She was abandoned—wife of an assassin who had killed the President.

Mailer's chapter on the mendacious Russian oaf who accuses Marina of being a prostitute, the portraits of the KGB men (oddly unaccompanied by parallel portraits of America's secret police), the picture of Oswald's mother—these are wonderfully deft. If only Mailer had been able to accept the inevitability of noninevitability, and to recognize that his book was bound to be a *Mystery* and not a *Tragedy*, Oswald's tale would have been genuinely grand. But, all right, there are more than enough elements of such an achievement to push you through from beginning to end, and to make you marvel at the writer's perspicacity, and at the events, and at the cold war, and at life in the Soviet Union, and at the strength of a literary tradition that wends its way, not without getting lost sometimes, from a world of naturalism to a world that looks at naturalism and wanly smiles.

PAUL BERMAN is a fellow of the New York Institute for the Humanities.

Liberty, Equality, Pornography

BY PETER BROOKS

The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France by Robert Darnton

(W.W. Norton, 440 pp., $27.50)

The Corpus of Clandestine Literature in France, 1769-1789 by Robert Darnton

(W.W. Norton, 260 pp., $32.50)

An engraving from 1771 on the jacket of Robert Darnton's new exploration of the literary underground of the French Enlightenment pictures an author of *libelles*, or scurrilous pamphlets, dressed in armor and outfitted with mortars blasting off broadsides in all directions, aimed at various abuses of the Old Regime. The engraving served as frontispiece to one more volume of "scandalous anecdotes from the French court," this one proclaiming that it was "printed a hundred leagues from the Bastille, at the sign of liberty."

That liberty was seized, not granted, since censorship was the rule; and the book trade evoked by Darnton was clandestine, working under the cloak (often quite literally for the purveyors of forbidden material), in the interstices of a system that, as Tocqueville noted, tended to undermine its absolutism by its complexity. Darnton has spent his free time over the last twenty-five years digging in the archives of the Société-typographique de Neuchâtel (STN), which offer the only complete records of an eighteenth-century publisher and wholesaler. The STN, just beyond the border in Switzerland, was ideally placed for producing illegal books and shipping them down the Rhône or Rhine rivers, or over the Jura mountains, to those French booksellers willing to take the risks of supplying their customers.

What Darnton finds, in his masterful and lively account of the STN's activities, is that there was a class of books called *livres philosophiques* that included not only banned works by such as Voltaire, Rousseau, d'Holbach, Helvétius, but also such other clandestine best-sellers as the "pornographic" *Thérèse philosophe* and *Histoire de dom B. . . , portier des Chartreux*, the scandalous account of Louis XV's mistress, *Anecdotes sur Mme la comtesse du Barry*, and Louis-Sébastien Mercier's utopian *L'An 2440*. The illegal material often arrived in France sandwiched into utterly proper reading, such as the *Liturgie des Protestants en France*, requiring a knowledgeable unpacker.

Darnton discovers that there was a large demand for this clandestine material, both of the type that we normally would call "philosophical" and in the categories that he calls philosophical pornography, utopian fantasy and political slander. (In his companion volume, *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature in France, 1769-1789*, Darnton gives further statistical analysis of the underground trade.) The purpose of his research is to ask whether traditional explanations of cause and effect between the works of Enlightenment philosophes and the French Revolution make sense. Was the Revolution the work of Voltaire and Rousseau? Do books make revolutions? If so, how?

This is big game. Darnton extends his earlier work on the underground book trade to pose this more pointed and powerful question. He wants to answer yes, books do make revolutions. But that is true, he wishes to show, only if one extends the list of books, beyond those the historians normally hold responsible for creating a fire in men's minds—Rousseau's *Social Contract*, Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*, Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopedia*—to these other works that the book trade called "philosophical." These were the true best-sellers. Or at least they were best-sellers along with such sober stuff as d'Holbach's materialist *System of Nature*, Helvétius's *On Man*, Rousseau's *Emile*. To get at the mentality of a nation unconsciously preparing itself for the greatest political upheaval of modern times, you need to reach down into its ordinary writings, into its ephemeral

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material, to find out what was consumed most avidly, what set the tone for thinking and believing.

For Darnton, more precisely, the question of whether books cause revolutions has been a question *mal posée.* The right question has been asked, but in the wrong way. This surely is correct: we can guess that dry philosophical tomes don't in themselves send people into battle. Still, when one looks at Darnton's list of the thirty-five best-selling books of the period 1769-1789, it is somewhat astonishing to note how well the serious philosophical books did. If *L'An 2440* and *Anecdotes sur Mme la comtesse du Barry* head the list, d'Holbach's heavy *Système de la nature* stands in third place, Raynal's *Histoire philosophique* in fifth, Voltaire's *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie* in eleventh—and the list includes as well Rousseau's *Works* and Helvétius's *De l'homme* and other such works. What Darnton does not attempt to explain is why an age so given to the aesthetics of pleasure, with such a large consumption of frivolities, also made place for the seriously philosophical.

Darnton is so intent on showing that these well-known attacks on existing beliefs and the regnant order were larded with the pornographic and the scurrilous books, so eager to claim that the standard canon doesn't tell the whole story, that he neglects to stop and marvel at the fact that, by his own account, Voltaire and d'Holbach were the top-selling authors of the period. I find this a serious flaw in Darnton's approach, though an understandable one given his desire to work revisions on a tradition of historical explanation that has given too much weight to the philosophes.

He makes the point that literary history is

> an artificial construct, passed on and reworked from generation to generation. "Minor" authors and "major" best-sellers inevitably get lost in the shuffle. We do not expect the best-sellers of our own day to be read two hundred years from now. But do we not think that literary history should take account of the literature that reached the most people?

To be sure, and many literary historians have recently made the same point. Literary history, like cultural and social history, is being largely revised to take account of the perspective of popular culture, the works and the attitudes that define the ordinary expectations of readers at a given time, expectations that the great and enduring works may forcefully incarnate, or transgress—or both at once. Literary history has also, in some of its branches, turned to the story of readers' reception of and response to literature, tracing the changing "interpretive horizons" that make the same books say different things across the ages. Darnton is aware that the history of the book and the book trade (where his work joins that of a number of recent French historians) needs to be extended by a history of reading, of how people made sense of the lines on a page. This is an even more recalcitrant and mysterious subject.

Where Darnton is most convincing is in his claim that "the 'philosophy' circulating through the channels of the underground book trade differed considerably from the set of ideas commonly associated with the Enlightenment." When one accepts the printers' and booksellers' categorization of the philosophical, it becomes evident that "liberty and libertinism appear to be linked, and we can find affinities among all the best-sellers in the clandestine catalogs." To be sure, students of French literature know that libertinism, for at least a couple of centuries, meant free thought and free living, a refusal to be constrained by religious and social dogma in matters of belief and morals. It is a durable tradition in France, at least from the time of the poet Théophile de Viau, whose libertinage led to his prosecution early in the seventeenth century to Diderot, whose spokesman in *Rameau's Nephew* announces, "My thoughts, they're like loose women." Molière's *Don Juan*—rather more explicitly than Mozart's *Don Giovanni*—pursues his catalog of women not merely from a desire for sexual satisfaction but also in a quest to know. He is a freethinker who defies the dictates of church and state in his restless need to test the emptiness of the heavens, the lack of any transcendent law.

To someone who has delved into the rich erotic literature of the French eighteenth century, the connections of freedom from sexual constraint and free thinking are evident. Even such frivolous material as Crébillon's masterful erotic dialogues, *La Nuit et le moment* and *Le Hasard du coin du feu,* turn on the seducer's attempt to divest the object of his attentions of her social and moral "prejudices" as well as her clothes. Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, Mirabeau all wrote "pornography" (a term and a concept that, Darnton points out, date from Victorianism and are not part of the Enlightenment's categorization of literature) along with their serious works.

This tradition reaches a kind of paroxysm during the Revolution itself, in the Marquis de Sade's *La Philosophie dans le boudoir,* which interweaves the most outrageous sexual acts with disquisitions on morality and society and the need to make political revolution lead to a true revolution in sexuality and the psychic life. Sade's greatest political tract, "Frenchmen, one further effort if you want to become republicans," is inserted during a pause in the erotic action. And the point is that it carries the same message as the continual violations of "normal" sex: free yourself from convention, from inherited rules, from everything that is not founded in "nature," which is ultimately a kind of non-principle, since nature permits everything and forbids nothing.

Sade's libertines discourse incessantly. They take no pleasure in bodily actions alone: they must say their outrageous acts, turn them into language, make sure that their listeners (and their readers) understand how taboos are being transgressed and understand the revolutionary import of these transgressions. Sade has achieved the status of a classic—he is now published in the Pléiade series, which virtually defines the French canon—because he articulated, long before Nietzsche or Dostoyevsky, the seductions of thought beyond the permitted. In the desacralized universe, he proclaims, "all is permitted." In such vertiginous freedom, act and word encounter their frightening possibilities.

Sade falls outside Darnton's time frame, but his work is prepared by such as *Dom B..., portier des Chartreux,* a tale of libidinous goings-on in a monastery, and *Thérèse philosophe.* This latter book, probably from the pen of the Marquis d'Argens, is one of the three works from which Darnton gives a generous excerpt, in translation, in the second half of his book. (The other two are Mercier's *L'An 2440* and *Anecdotes sur Mme la comtesse du Barry,* probably written by one Pidansat de Mairobert.) Coming from Sade, *Thérèse philosophe* would be fairly tame stuff, but it is nonetheless worthy of the genre that Rousseau famously described as "books that can be read only with one hand."

The story puts the reader, like Thérèse herself during the early stages of her initiation, into the position of the voyeur, as she watches the Reverend Father Dirrag put his pupil Mlle Eradice into "celestial happiness" by inserting what he calls "the cord of Saint Francis" as she kneels in prayer with her skirts pulled up. Thérèse eventually undergoes her own initiation, first into the

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reasonable pleasures of masturbation, then into a life of blissful coitus interruptus with the Count, free from children and from the prejudices of the world. And her progress in erotic enlightenment is interspersed with disquisitions on the falsities of theology, the determining influence of physiology, the role of self-love, the light of reason.

Thus Thérèse proclaims, near the end of her adventures,

> How many fools—if ever this manuscript should appear—would cry out against sensuality, against the moral and metaphysical principles it contains! I would answer these fools, these clunking machines, these sorts of automatons accustomed to think with the brain of someone else, who do this or that thing only because they are told to do it—I would answer them, I say, that everything I have written is based on experience and on reason freed of all prejudice.

Here, as Darnton so well sees, is an authentic voice of Enlightenment, using bodily experience—meaning essentially sexual experience, as that most subject to repression—to claim the right to think beyond the bounds set by conventional morals. *Thérèse philosophe* clearly belongs among those more dignified works of philosophy that contributed to awakening curiosity about what might be permitted if mankind left that self-imposed infancy (as Kant put it) that preceded the tests of reason.

If *Thérèse philosophe* contributed in some general way to freeing thought from its inherited straitjackets, *Anecdotes sur Mme la comtesse du Barry* would seem to beg a more specific political effect. This story of the rise to power of the prostitute who became Louis XV's *maîtresse en titre* is a clever, scandalous and thorough trashing of the monarchy and its governing class. Constantly cross-cutting from anecdotes of Louis's sex life—failing, but revived by Mme du Barry's well-practiced skills, according to this chronicle—to court intrigues and their dire consequences for the nation, it paints a picture of a Versailles so corrupt, egotistical, disoriented, vicious and out of control that Louis's famous and no doubt apocryphal "*Après nous, le déluge*" seems a kind of minimum recognition of the need to sweep things clean.

Whatever the accuracy of the *Anecdotes*, it achieves a kind of authenticity by its mixing of hard political history with hearsay and the citation of letters and "secret documents" and satirical doggerel circulating in Paris. One of these, from a moment of virulent court intrigue and general famine, mocked the *Pater noster*:

> Our Father, who art in Versailles. Abhorred be Thy name. Thy kingdom is shaken. Thy will is no longer done on earth or in heaven. Give us back this day our daily bread, which Thou hast taken from us. Forgive Thy parlements who have upheld Thy interests, as Thou forgiveth those ministers who have sold them. Be not led into temptation by du Barry. But deliver us from that devil of a chancellor. Amen!

Strong stuff.

When one measures such writing against the supposed absolutism of the regime, its claims to suppress dissent and censor political libel, one is made aware of just how important the clandestine book trade was. To have succeeded in making the *Anecdotes* the number two best-seller of the time was clearly to have contributed, forcefully, to the undermining of the regime that would eventuate, pretty much to everyone's astonishment, in the Revolution. As Darnton puts it, "the ideological origins of the Revolution should be understood as a process of deligitimating the Old Regime rather than as a prophecy of the new one. And nothing sapped legitimacy more effectively than the literature of libel."

Louis-Sébastien Mercier, the author of *L'An 2440*, understood better than most of his contemporaries that book publishing was contributing to the creation of that new, modern phenomenon that we call public opinion. "A great and momentous revolution in our ideas has taken place within the last thirty years," he wrote in 1778.

> Public opinion has now become a preponderant power in Europe, one that cannot be resisted ... one may hope that enlightened ideas will bring about the greatest good on earth and that tyrants of all kinds will tremble before the universal cry that echoes everywhere, awakening Europe from its slumbers.

Whatever model of the dissemination of ideas one adopts—and Darnton spends some time trying to construct a model of the "communication circuit," its places and materials—it is clear enough that subversive ideas were in circulation and that they attracted widespread attention.

But whose attention? And what kind of attention? Darnton, whose work stands in dialogue with that of historians of the book and of reading such as Roger Chartier, is aware that we can never really know how these clandestine books were read. In a chapter called "Readers Respond to Rousseau," in his earlier book, *The Great Cat Massacre*, Darnton was able to extend the work of Daniel Mornet and discuss actual readers' responses to what was probably the number one best-seller of the century, Rousseau's novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Lacking such documentation for his clandestine best-sellers, he must warn us that we don't really know how they were read. We can't fully enter the consciousness of eighteenth-century French men and women, and we don't know how they construed the printed pages we can still read today.

This is a valuable warning, and one that makes Darnton aspire to a concrete study of political events and their contemporary interpretations, in an effort to construct the readerly response to the political and develop what he calls a "history of meaning." Still, Darnton may worry this point too much. Important literature survives to be read by future readers because it becomes "decontextualized," as Michael Riffaterre has put it: it outlives the immediate circumstances and issues and contexts in which it was written and published. The historian of the book and reading wants, of course, to recontextualize, to restore literature to the precise milieu of its production and interpretation. This is a necessary enterprise and, when it gives such rich discoveries about the circulation of forgotten texts as Darnton provides, a compelling one. Yet as Darnton seems loath to admit—a literary critic and historian can say this more candidly—reading itself can make the imaginative leap necessary to conceive what it must have been like to sit up all night with *La Nouvelle Héloïse* or to shut the door for a go at (or with) *Thérèse philosophe*.

It is, in fact, one of the characteristics of the printed book, circulated in multiple copies, that it creates reading as a private experience. The rise of the novel in the eighteenth century is all about that privacy. The heroine of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, the most influential novel of the century, scribbles letters from her private "closet," while Lovelace plots to invade her privacy. There is the paradox: privacy depends on publication, making the private public, and publication in turn is realized in privacy, in a realm where actions (those books read with one hand) and thoughts are not entirely accessible to public scrutiny. The history of reading always will contain a measure of the unmeasurable. But even in our contemporary reading, we can intuit that the books revived by Darnton did indeed, by whatever circuits, have a revolutionary outcome.

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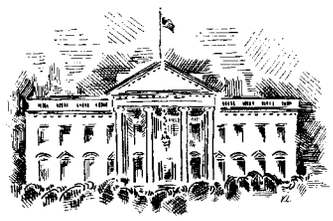
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Patriot games

THE RESULTS ARE IN. SIX WEEKS after Bill Clinton had the Secret Service peremptorily shut down the swath of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House, the people of Washington, D.C., and of the United States, have passed judgment. It is a surprising success. When the street was closed in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing and exaggerated fears of domestic terrorism, critics trashed the president for hunkering down, for adopting a siege mentality, for cowardice. "People live on streets," jeered David von Drehle in *The Washington Post*. "Kings live in parks." But walk by the 1600 block almost any afternoon now and you'll see Rollerbladers and skateboarders and families of tourists ambling by in the summer sun. People take their dogs, or their babies in strollers, out for walks. You almost expect to see Al Gore and Leon Panetta stretched out in lawnchairs, wearing Bermudas, greeting passersby. The blockade, instead of removing the president from the people, has in fact brought people closer to the White House. Once simply a postcard-ready landmark, the mansion now seems more truly a public building, part of a living city. Even as the papers lament the demise of a "symbol of national openness" (the *Post*) or "the American symbolism of open government" (the *Times*), the presidential piazza is creating a spirit of accessibility and community reminiscent of People's Park circa 1968.

A MORE DISTURBING CONSEquence of Oklahoma City is that we've come to see how right-wing fringe groups have hijacked two once-honorable words, "militias" and "patriots." They're trying hard to evoke the spirit not of 1968 but of 1776. Timothy McVeigh once likened his anti-government venom to the passions behind the Boston Tea Party; others have linked the infamous date of April 19 not just to Waco but to Lexington and Concord. The extremists are trying to justify their own peculiar beliefs in the name of the Founding Fathers, to trade on the aura of sanctity that surrounds the Founders in the American mind. What's remarkable is how willingly the press has acquiesced in adopting these inapt labels. TV reports regularly use the terms "patriots" and "militias," without even an exculpatory lilt in the voice to suggest quotation marks drawn in the air. In a few short months, the public meaning of these words has been totally transformed. These days, if you hear a reference to "patriot groups," you know you've gone beyond the DAR and the American Legion into camouflage territory. Of course, the popular definition of patriotism has been creeping rightward for a while now. It may be false nostalgia to believe that the term once meant nothing more than Fourth of July cookouts and George M. Cohan, or saving scrap metal and buying war bonds. But, at some point between Richard Nixon's Silent Majority speech and Ronald Reagan's Morning in America campaign, "patriotism"—and such trappings as the American flag, the Pledge of Allegiance and "The Star-Spangled Banner"—was decisively captured by the right. This latest turn only confirms that, as pundits have been noting, liberals have surrendered the language of devotion to country.



AS JULY 4 APPROACHES, CONGRESSmen and columnists are duking it out in another round of the tiresome but, alas, necessary battles over flag-burning and prayer in school. Republicans, tossing off constitutional amendments as if they were tax breaks, have proposed measures to outlaw the former and sanction the latter. House Judiciary Chairman Henry Hyde, who laudably opposed a term-limits amendment, has switched back from his benign Jekyll personality to lead the flag-desecration amendment out of committee for a possible vote on the House floor. Democrats, meanwhile, ever on the defensive, struggle to protect the First Amendment while desperately clinging to whatever tattered shred of the patriotism issue they still hold. It's a painful spectacle to watch, though it has resulted in such splendidly strained locutions as Clinton's assertion that he wants "to stop flag-burning before it starts." Once again, Clinton has found a middle ground that pleases no one: opposing a flag-desecration amendment while touting the anti-flag-burning law he signed as governor of Arkansas. Amendments, apparently, are expressions of deep belief, and laws mere tools of political expediency.

THE CATCH IS THAT LIBERALS DO have a problem, philosophically, with slathering on the patriotism. It's not a coincidence that Democratic attempts to invoke a rhetoric of liberal patriotism always sound forced, heavy-handed, illegitimate. It's not that they don't love the U.S.A. as much as the next guy. But, with so much baggage attached to deliberately "patriotic" gestures, it's hard to engage in them without some awareness of the cynical as well as the genuine efforts to which they've been put. During Vietnam, flag-waving meant not just supporting the war but taunting its critics; during the 1988 campaign, George Bush used the pledge issue to subtly call attention to Michael Dukakis's Greek ethnicity. The impulse behind the new amendments is not, after all, to allow the expression of religious belief or to protect a symbol, but to foster conformity. Such efforts are, and should be, inimical to liberal values. That's even worth celebrating on July 4, if you can convince the American public.

NOT LONG AGO, *The Washington Post*'s Food section ran an exposé that was the talk of offices across this city. Its revelation: that the "fat-free" muffins sold at bakeries and lunchtime eateries everywhere are in fact loaded with lipids. One four-ounce muffin contained almost nine grams of fat, the article said; another, while faring better on the fat meter, still packed 486 calories. After this life-imitates-"Seinfeld" episode, muffins quickly fell out of favor. They have been replaced by, of all things, bagels. It's a bit disconcerting to see the food you ate every Sunday for a whole boyhood turn up suddenly as a dieter's delight. I was always taught that you lard up a bagel with just enough cream cheese and lox to render yourself unable to do anything but read the Sunday newspaper for the rest of the afternoon. Now, at the nearby bagelry, they're dressing up granola bagels with hummus and alfalfa sprouts and selling them with Snapple as a low-fat lunch. God help us! And the granola's just a taste of the sacrilege. Among the other newfangled varieties are blueberry and chocolate chip (presumably for those still partial to muffins), cheese, banana nut, pesto (for those partial to pasta) and, I kid you not, sundried-tomato-and-basil. Though tempted to pronounce this last grotesque concoction unfit for human consumption, I made a point, unlike film buff Bob Dole, of sampling it first. And I have concluded: it is a grotesque concoction unfit for human consumption. Now, I realize tastes change and bagels aren't immune from the vicissitudes of yuppie chic. But I do want the casual lunchtime banana nut-bagel consumer to realize we're dealing with an important symbol here. The bagel should not be desecrated.

DAVID GREENBERG

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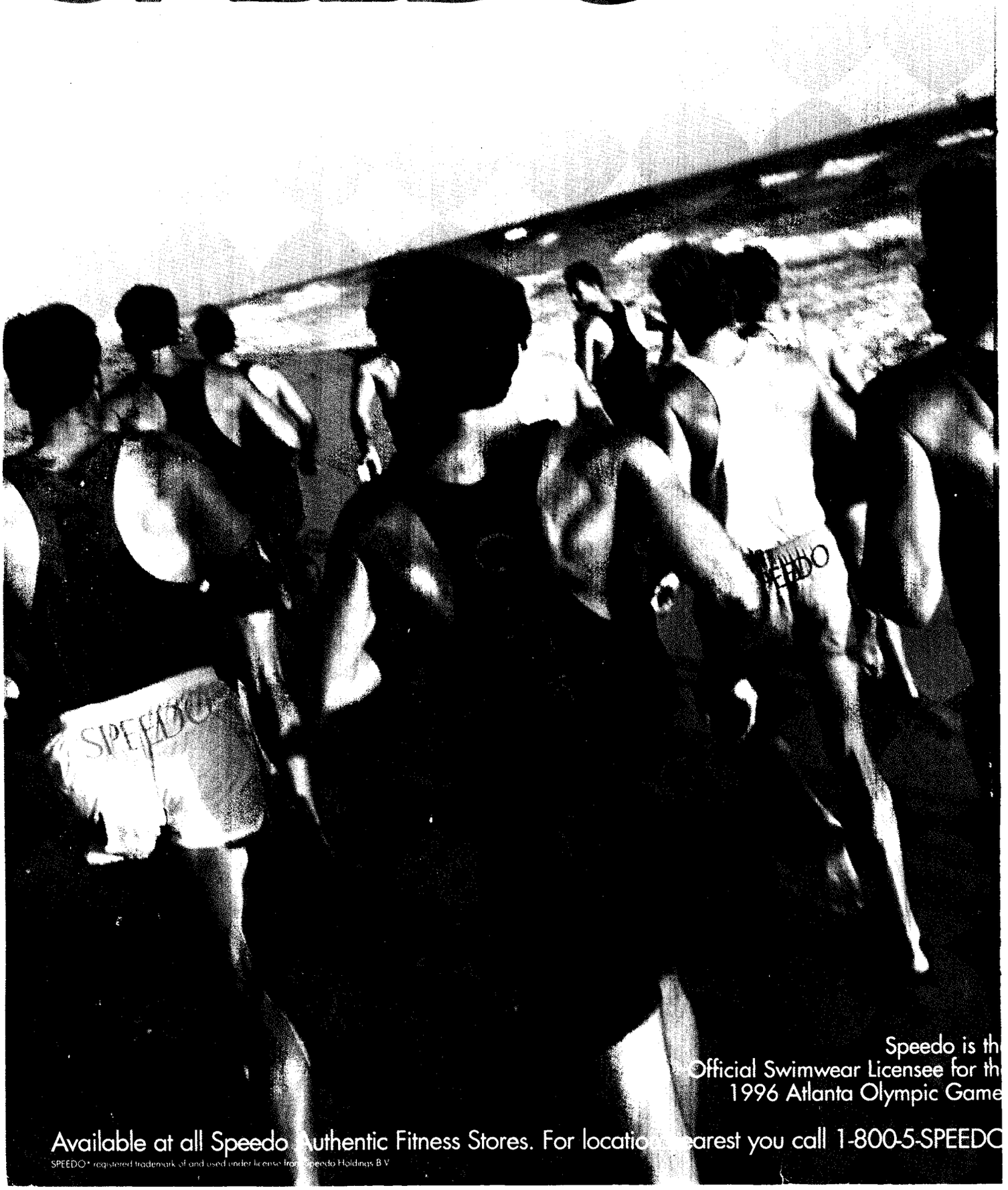
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